

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

June 12, 2000

## Poverty in America



## And What We Can Do About It

Plus: Richard Mertens on Kosovo  
& Juan Gonzalez on Vieques



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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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## Letters

### Welcome Back, John

It was a pleasure to see a long and thoughtful review of my book, *The Paradox of American Democracy* ("Corporate Ideals," May 1). Except, that is, for the last sentence, which seemed to have been inserted by an evil elf determined to sow misunderstanding of my book.

Your reviewer, Kim Phillips-Fein, concludes that there is "something ahistorical and rather self-serving about Judis' suggestion that social reform can only come from bankers, academics, businessmen, journalists—in short, people exactly like himself." I never argue this in my book. I write in the book's conclusion (and elsewhere): "To fulfill the promise of democracy—to create genuine countervailing power—America needs a rebirth of popular movements." The "paradox" of American democracy is that reform movements have also required the participation of elites.

If anything, this argument about elites may owe too much to history: If you look at the reforms adopted during Wilson's first term, the second New Deal of 1935 to 1936 and Nixon's first term, what you find is that elites—working within government or through policy groups, newspapers, foundations and later think tanks—played a very important role. As a thought experiment, imagine what the environmental and consumer movements of 1966 to 1973 would have been like without Rachel Carson, Ralph Nader and the Ford Foundation, which provided about four-fifths of the funds for public interest law and policy groups during that period.

There is a different argument lurking within this review that doesn't depend upon a misreading of what I wrote. Phillips-Fein contends that groups like the Ford Foundation or the National Civic Federation (NCF) did not really promote reform, but have simply sought to "defuse popular radicalism." She writes: "The corporate leaders in the NCF—and to some extent Ford, during the '60s—were seeking to find ways to legitimate their power at a time when ... the rule of business was hardly accepted."

I spend a large part of the first chapter disputing this view, but let me make two brief points here. First, some of the participants in the NCF and a few of the board members of the Ford Foundation (though not the leadership at all) may have been business leaders looking after their own interests, but there were always other organizations designed to do exactly this. The officers and members of National Association of Manufacturers knew and frequently complained that there was a difference between themselves and the NCF or Ford Foundation. The elite organizations, by contrast, were consciously committed to pluralism. At Ford, for instance,

McGeorge Bundy put a former labor leader in charge of national programs.

Secondly, you have to understand the distinction between "reform," as the term has been commonly used (e.g. Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*), and "revolution" or "radicalism." Many of the elites and elite organizations did oppose revolution, which they saw not merely as a threat to business, but as an invitation to disorder and chaos—and in the case of communism, as a foreign threat to America. They didn't believe that the Wobblies and Socialists of the pre-World War I years, or the New Left of the '60s, had a coherent notion of what socialism or revolution would mean—and they were right about this. My book defines the progressive tradition, and the role of elites within it, as seeking to preserve the older ideals of liberty and equality within the broad framework of corporate capitalism. In this sense, the NCF or Ford Foundation represented reform, and the Wobblies or Weathermen did not.

John B. Judis  
Washington

**Kim Phillips-Fein replies:** My disagreement with Judis isn't so much about whether reform movements require the participation of elites; it's the relationship between the "elite" and popular politics. As Judis' letter (and his book) makes clear, he thinks that there once existed a virtuous elite committed to maintaining social equality and democracy under corporate capitalism. And it's true that at particular historical moments, some factions within the business class have promoted social reforms, like workers' comp or Social Security. The question is, why?

The periods Judis points to—Wilson's early years, the second New Deal and the early '70s—were all ones of dramatic popular political upheaval. Elites in these periods did not seek reforms because they were committed to pluralism, equality and democracy in the abstract, but because they were under pressure from the Socialists, the Wobblies and the CIO. Many of the particular reforms they championed originated on the left; in the Progressive era, as historians like David Montgomery have shown, the reform proposals eventually picked up by the NCF originated with the Socialist Party and labor movement. Imagine the Wagner Act, which had only lukewarm support from Roosevelt, passing if workers hadn't already joined unions in the early '30s.

Without widespread popular mobilization, think tanks and magazines won't do much good; take a liberal think tank like the Economic Policy Institute, which produces dozens of position papers that hardly ever make it into policy. Instead of opposing "radicalism" and "reform," Judis might consider that elites promote reform only under pressure from more extreme, radical groups.

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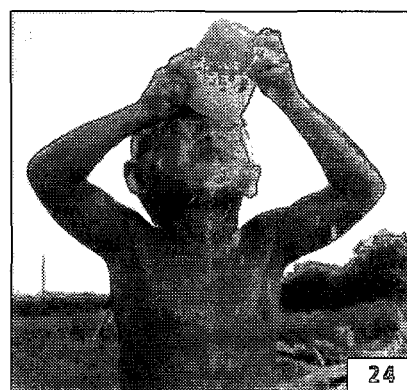
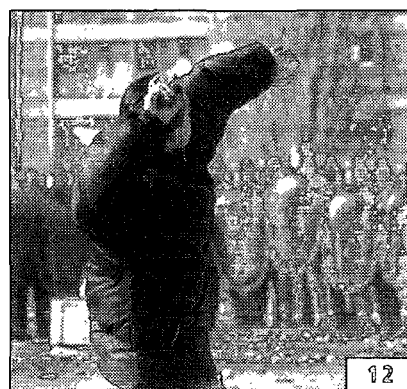
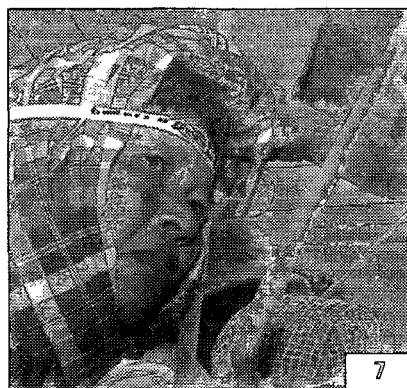
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## Face Reality

By Joel Bleifuss

Supporters of third parties have filed a suit against the Federal Election Commission, charging that it has permitted a partisan group to ban third-party candidates from this fall's presidential debates. The Commission on Presidential Debates has decided only candidates who garner 15 percent support in five national polls can participate.

The suit asks a New York federal court to issue an injunction to stop the three debates from taking place. The plaintiffs charge that the debate commission, a group composed entirely of Democrats and Republicans, has written presidential debate regulations to suit their own interests. Ralph Nader has promised to make inclusion in the debates one of his key campaign issues.

Hello? It's called a two-party system for a reason. Somehow that fact never sinks in. Remember 1980? That year Barry Commoner formed the Citizens Party, galvanizing those disenchanted with Carter's conservatism in a noble run for the presidency. But the only time the national press noticed his campaign was when the word "bullshit" was used in a radio commercial.

In *These Times* editorialized back in 1980: "Both in theory and as a practical matter, the primary emphasis on presidential politics is a dead end. ... As a matter of practical politics, the only hope the left has of electing progressives to office is on the scale of a legislative election, either to state legislatures, city councils or Congress. ... The road to power—and, in the short run, to popular agitation around progressive principles—lies first through the legislature."

In 1980 it was Commoner, in 2000 it is Nader, a man who has devoted his life to exposing the perfidious influence of corporate power. But if Nader were serious about running for president, he would have begun laying the groundwork for a 2000 presidential bid in 1996. And a first step would have been helping the Green Party get its act together. (Except for in a handful of states like New Mexico and California, the party doesn't exist as such.)

If Nader were serious about influencing the national discourse, he would have run in the Democratic primary, where progressive candidates have an opportunity to present ideas that normally don't get a public hearing. By debating Al Gore and Bill Bradley, Nader could have reached an audience of millions. This year, more than any other, we needed a challenge to the somnambulant corporate centrism of Gore and Bradley. Absent a third party that is well organized from the grassroots

up, progressives must stay focused on putting pressure on those Democrats who claim to represent

them, something a Nader run for the Democratic nomination would have done admirably.

Since Nader and the progressives who support him have neither built a third party nor challenged the Democratic establishment, one must conclude that candidate Nader fulfills another role—that of civil confessor. Citizens disgusted with the status quo can leave a voting

booth with their integrity reaffirmed.

Their message is clear: We are not serious about political change. For too many on the left, electoral politics has devolved from civic participation into a lifestyle choice. One eats organic food to stay healthy, exercises to stay fit, and votes for Nader to avoid tainting principles with the give-and-take of real politics.

But let's not blame the victim. Like the poor, those progressives disengaged from party politics are understandably alienated. The current campaign finance system functions as a form of legalized bribery that allows the rich and powerful to pick and choose who gets elected. The Democratic Party, increasingly in thrall to corporate interests, has seen its popular base whither.

**For too many on the left, electoral politics has devolved from civic participation into a lifestyle choice.**

There are exceptions: In states like Minnesota and Vermont and in congressional districts like those around the Bay Area, the progressive movement is part and parcel of the political establishment. Those are the models to emulate if we want to move beyond the current quadrennial exercise of hitching our wagon to the latest progressive star. ■

Terry LaBan



THE END OF CIVILIZATION AS WE KNOW IT

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## Marching On

### Unity 2000 plans to disrupt this summer's GOP convention

By Dave Lindorff

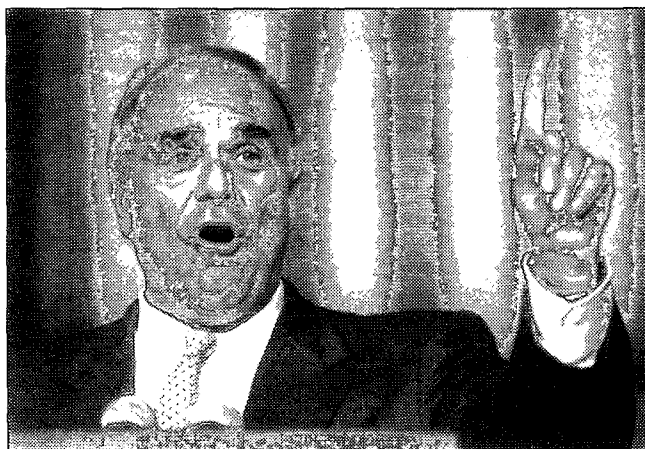
PHILADELPHIA—The City of Brotherly Love has backed down in its attempt to crush dissent during this summer's Republican National Convention. But the potential remains for a confrontation between demonstrators and Philadelphia police during the week-long event.

Faced with a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, the city agreed on April 28 to issue permits to two organizations planning to march on July 30, during the run-up to the convention. In March, the city had denied permits for the groups—Unity 2000 and The Ad-Hoc Committee to Defend Health Care—and had required them to confine their activities to a remote area only 40-by-190 feet. Meanwhile, Republicans will have access to all 10 blocks around the First Union Convention Center. The groups got permission to demonstrate on their originally planned route, along Benjamin Franklin Boulevard.

A third organization, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, still has not received a permit for its planned convention protest.

"I'm not satisfied," says Michael Morrill, spokesman for Unity 2000, a coalition of some 100 progressive organizations anticipating more than 100,000 marchers. "It annoys me that we had to bring the city to court to get this, and I'm concerned that there are only two legal demonstrations. The police have said they will quarantine a five-block radius around the convention center, so any groups that try to bring their protests to the convention site will be arrested."

If that situation sounds reminiscent of recent events in Washington and Seattle, it's no coincidence. To back up Philadelphia's severe restrictions on protest activity during the Republican convention, the city sent a dozen of its top officers to observe the way Washington police handled the demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in April. Philadelphia's finest returned from



Former Mayor Ed Rendell masterminded the restrictions.

ROBERT GIROUX/NEWSMAKERS

Washington full of praise for the D.C. cops' "restraint," but vowed to be even more liberal in their use of tear gas if protesters this summer step out of their permitted demonstration area.

Unity 2000 is a broad coalition of organizations including everything from ACT UP to the NAACP and various trade unions. Its focus is economic globalization, universal health care and workers rights. The death penalty and the fate of Mumia Abu-Jamal, currently on Pennsylvania's Death Row for the 1981 killing of a white Philadelphia policeman, while not a part of the coalition's agenda, are also likely to be major protest issues.

Philadelphia went all out last year to land the Republican convention. Ed Rendell, then mayor and now chairman of the Democratic National Committee allowed the Republican Party to deny protesters any access around the convention site. All convention organizers had to do was claim they have plans for those locations. The only place left was the so-called "protest pit."

Protest organizations, so far, have taken a hard line against the city's plans. "We won't be applying for a slot in the censorship pit," says Pete Davis, an activist with Philadelphia's ACT UP. "As far as I know, no other groups are signing up for it either. We feel that the city's efforts to contain protest is likely to backfire, and lead to a greater degree of civil disorder than if they'd just be more open."

So far, the only organization that has agreed to the city's terms and applied for a permit to demonstrate at the designated site is the Greyhound Adoption Group, which says it just wants to show off some dogs. ■

## Philly Strikes Out

Philadelphia wasn't alone in selling its soul to land the GOP convention. It was joined by the Philadelphia AFL-CIO Central Labor Council, which convinced local building trades and other unions to sign a labor peace accord with the Republican National Committee, promising no job actions during the convention by unions involved in any aspect of the event—including hotel and restaurant workers.

But this agreement has been condemned by the public employees unions, like AFSCME District Council 47, which represents 3,500 of the city's white-collar employees, and the Fraternal Order of Police. A number of public-employee contracts are due to expire, and those unions want to be able to count on public and private union support if they have to strike this summer.

Tom Cronin, president of District Council 47, charges that the Central Labor

Council has signed a scab agreement with a party that has been responsible for anti-labor legislation. "Strikes are the working person's only weapon," he says.

The dispute has hurt labor participation in the Unity 2000 protests, but it hasn't stopped it altogether. John Rauscher, president of the Central Labor Council, claims that unions that weren't party to the legally binding labor peace pledge are free to strike. "If any unions like the municipal workers have to go on strike during the convention," he vows. "Heck, I'll be out there on the line with them."

This could leave the Republicans in an awkward position. Since the Fraternal Order of Police is one of the public employees' unions that refused to sign on to a labor peace pledge, Republican delegates could conceivably find themselves faced with an army of protesters and a police force out with a mass case of the "blue flu."

D.L.

# The Other Side of the Street

## Food workers target Goldman Sachs

By Kim Phillips-Fein

NEW YORK—Lower Manhattan is home to the stars of the '90s boom: investment banks taking the latest dot-com miracles public; stock markets where wealth multiplies seemingly by magic; number crunchers inventing ever more complex derivatives. Here sits the Fed, always prepared to bail out a hedge fund or slow a crash. Here, the brokerages trade trillions across the globe, all squashed together in these few skinny blocks jutting out into the Hudson.

But there remains a grittier side. Once, the tip of the island was the heart of working-class New York, home to the harbor, wholesale markets and innumerable small factories. Today, though the economy has shifted, it remains the workplace for tens of thousands of New

Yorkers who bus restaurant tables, clean office buildings and sit behind cash registers. While the surging stock market is a symbol of the new economy, Wall Street is also the site of a union fight reminiscent of the New Deal: Food service workers at many of New York's most prominent investment banks are starting, despite formidable resistance, to join unions.

One of these struggles is being waged at 85 Broad Street, the headquarters of investment banking firm Goldman Sachs—one of the oldest private partnerships on Wall Street until it went public last year. Goldman has long prided itself on its cohesive corporate culture (dubbed the "culture of success" in a hagiography of the company published last year). In legend at least, the firm is supposed to hire bright Ivy League grads who are trained to subordinate their individual ambitions to the corporate good—for which they are rewarded mightily.

But the myth of company solidarity excludes the 115 workers in Goldman's dining room and cafeterias, who labor long days for an average wage of less than \$9 an hour. The majority are immigrants from Latin America. Many have worked at Goldman for years. Their

meager wages are supplemented by piddling benefits: The company's health plan costs \$45 a week for family coverage, a hefty price for workers barely earning above the poverty line. Employment is fairly stable, but workers can be fired at will. Workers say their managers are frequently unreasonable, insulting and abusive. Customers can sometimes be demeaning as well. As Julio Morel, a longtime employee, puts it, "These people see you every day. But to them you are nothing. You are only a servant because they have money."

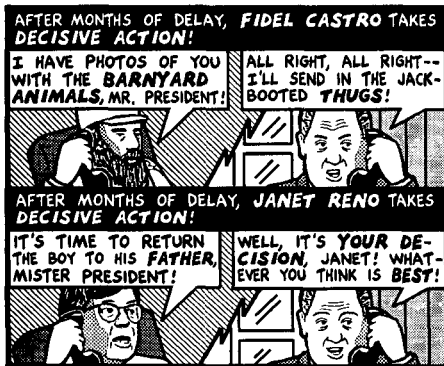
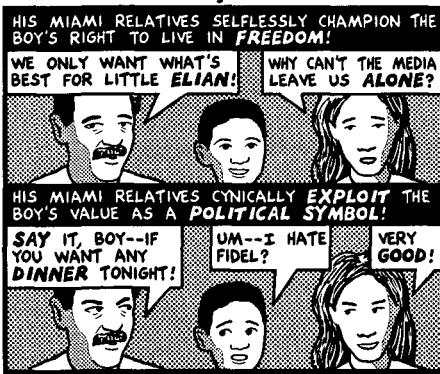
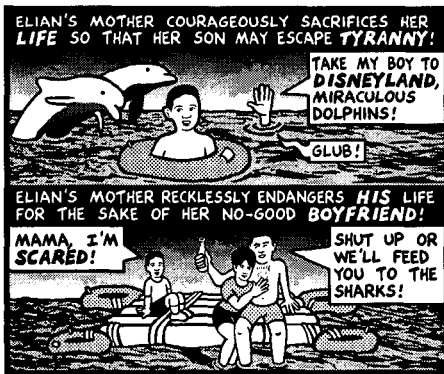
For all these reasons—and most of all, "because it gives you the freedom to express your rights," says Pedro Acosta, who has worked at Goldman Sachs for four years—workers want to join Local 100 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE). Last summer, an overwhelming majority of the workers signed an open petition in favor of running a card-check election for the union. But they've been stonewalled by the firm—even though Goldman Sachs' partners made \$3.5 billion in their IPO last year.

The workers at 85 Broad Street and the three other Goldman buildings in Manhattan are not employed directly by the company but by Restaurant Associates, one of the largest cafeteria subcontracting chains in the United States. The subcontracting relationship enables Goldman to evade responsibility for what's happening in the cafeteria, and the investment bank's official position is that the workers should hold a National Labor Relations Board election. "Our primary interest is in allowing the cafeteria workers to decide independently on this matter," Thomas McAdam, Goldman's director of food services, wrote in a January 7 letter to the union.

But Restaurant Associates is unlikely to let the cafeteria workers "decide independently." In December, the NLRB issued a complaint against the company, charging it with interrogating workers at Goldman about union activities and threatening to revoke the company's 401 (k) plan if the union gets voted in. At the Metropolitan Opera House—where Restaurant Associates also runs the cafeteria—the company has been charged with denying workers pay increases and benefits, as well as firing a worker, because of union activity.

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW





# Bombs Away

**E**arly on the morning of May 4, a small army of FBI agents and U.S. marshals arrested 216 people on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques in an attempt to regain control of Camp Garcia, the Navy's bombing range there. Among those arrested were two members of Congress, Nydia Velazquez of New York and Luis Gutierrez of Chicago, as well as the Roman Catholic bishop of Caguas and the mayor of Carolina, one of Puerto Rico's biggest cities.

Many of those arrested had been occupying the range since a Puerto Rican security guard was killed last April by Navy bomber pilots who missed their targets. During that time, local fishermen, religious leaders, independence activists and environmentalists all had joined the peaceful occupation. Their actions, as previously reported in this column, ignited an unprecedented movement among all sectors of Puerto Rican society calling for an end to nearly 60 years of Navy bombing on Vieques.

The Vieques raid was the second time in a two-week span that the Justice Department found itself sending armed agents into action against Hispanic Americans. Vieques was preceded, of course, by the Elián González raid in Miami's Little Havana. In both assaults, the groups defying federal authorities had massive support from their ethnic compatriots. In both cases, they were preceded by stand-offs that stretched for months and became enmeshed in the web of presidential politics. But the Elián saga, with its soap opera plot, irresistible child star and that shocking photograph, garnered far greater media attention than Vieques, even if the latter crisis touched on far more weighty matters than some international family feud.

If you listen to Congress and the Pentagon, the entire combat-readiness of our nation hangs in the balance with Vieques. The Puerto Rican protesters, the military brass say, were undermining American defense by preventing use of the Navy's premier training range. The drum roll reached such a crescendo that few Americans could hear the nearly

unanimous plea of Puerto Rico's 3.8 million people against the bombing of their inhabited Isla Nena, as Vieques is known. That bombing—and the destruction of the island's coral reefs and environment—was not only a violation of human rights, Puerto Ricans insisted,



but a sign of continued U.S. colonial arrogance toward Puerto Rico.

Despite those pleas, the Pentagon and its supporters in Congress kept pressing President Clinton to move against the protesters. In January, Clinton made one of his infamous compromises with Puerto Rico's governor, Pedro Rossello. The accord called for the Navy to temporarily resume training on a sharply reduced schedule, using dummy bombs and ammunition.

In return, Rossello agreed to hold a referendum among the residents of Vieques that would decide whether the Navy should leave permanently after 2003. In addition, the White House promised \$40 million in infrastructure aid to Vieques immediately and another \$50 million if the referendum allowed the Navy to stay.

The agreement allows the Navy to set the date of the referendum at any point during an 18-month period that begins this August 1. This is perhaps the first time in history that the Navy has been charged with setting the date for a civilian referendum. White House officials privately conceded that the 18-month window was designed specifically to give the Navy time to mount a campaign to win (or buy) the backing of the Vieques population. In Puerto Rico, the governor's about-face led to a massive public outcry, especially by the island's church leaders,

who organized a silent march of nearly 100,000 people in support of the protesters several weeks ago, and who continued to urge civil disobedience against the Navy.

The actual raid was classic White House image management. It was launched soon after the death of New York City Cardinal John O'Connor, an event the president's aides knew would knock all other news from the front pages for several days in New York, which is home to the country's largest Puerto Rican community, and where Hillary Clinton is seeking a U.S. Senate seat. To limit the embarrassment of having to arrest congressmen and clerics, federal agents were ordered to release all protesters without charges.

The press promptly and dutifully dropped Vieques from its radar screen. But anyone familiar with Puerto Rico's history knows this battle is far from over. At least a half dozen protesters were still hiding in the hills and the underbrush of the Vieques range as I penned these words. They include two sons of Carlos Zenon, the Vieques fisherman who

**In Puerto Rico, the days of gunboat diplomacy, even in its current liberal guise, are over.**

sparked the first protests against the Navy's presence nearly two decades ago. The day before the federal raid, one of the Zenon brothers assured a colleague of mine that he had stashed enough food and supplies in several hiding places on the Vieques range to survive for several months. For the Navy to resume massive bombing while any civilians are still on the range is a very risky gamble.

At the same time, pro-independence leader Ruben Berrios Martinez and hundreds of others are vowing to reoccupy the range and to disrupt future Navy bombing attempts. No matter what Clinton and Rossello say, it's evident that only an immediate referendum and a speeded up timetable for Navy withdrawal will end the crisis. In Puerto Rico, the days of gunboat diplomacy, even in its liberal guise, are over. ■



# Star Wars: Episode Two

## The Pentagon's Latest Missile Defense Fantasy

By Jeffrey St. Clair

It's wrong to say that Star Wars is back. The hare-brained scheme hatched on the fly by Ronald Reagan in 1983 has never gone away. Quietly but relentlessly a Star Wars industry, under the rubric of Ballistic Missile Defense, has mushroomed.

The corporate press, which rightly heckled the plan in its early days, soon got bored with the story and left it for dead. Then in 1992, the missile shield's putative critics took over the White House and became its new masters. In the intervening years, billions of dollars poured into the Pentagon's Space and Missile Defense Command Center in Huntsville, Alabama, to production plants spread across key congressional districts, and into the plump accounts of a portfolio of defense contractors and high-tech firms.

In a 1995 review of the program in *DefenseIssues*, an internal Pentagon newsletter, Lt. Gen. Malcolm O'Neill, then head of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, rhapsodized about a "synergized" network of high-powered,

space-based lasers, satellites, radar and sea-, air- and ground-launched "exoatmospheric kill vehicles" that would save U.S. cities from "theater-class ballistic missiles, advanced cruise missiles and other air-breathing threats as well." Feel safer?

Now the Pentagon is seeking approval to put part of its system into operation. The first phase is a ground-based system of 100 Interceptor missiles and a ring of new radar stations, both to be based in the Alaskan tundra. Clinton has said he will make a final decision on the system this summer. All indications are that he will give it the green light.

Of course, there are problems. Namely, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and corporate America's coddling of China, why in the world would the United States need to deploy such a system? Such questions prompt the most absurd frenzy of threat-inflation since the notion that the Marxist government of Grenada posed a grave danger to the Western Hemisphere. A coven of atomic warriors has been rolled out to fulminate about "rogue nations" and "global



terrorists" who threaten what the Pentagon brass calls the "early post-Cold War paradigm." Of course, if Osama Bin Laden ever decides to strike back at his former friends in the U.S. government, his payload is much more likely to be delivered via FedEx in a Louis Vuitton suitcase than a rocket launched from his camp in the Hindu Kush.

**A**nother stumbling block is the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that flatly prohibits such a system, which the architects of the ABM treaty rightly saw as a destabilizing force that would spur proliferation and stockpiling of weapons. But the Clinton-Gore administration views the ABM treaty as outmoded and, in a now customary display of hubris, on April 25, U.S. Ambassador James Collins delivered a draft copy of proposed changes to Moscow. The tenor of the U.S. rewrite didn't sit well with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who warned it could prove a "fatal mistake." "Everyone should be aware that the collapse of the ABM treaty would have a destructive domino effect for the existing system of disarmament agreements," he said. "We would be back in an era of suspicion and confrontation."

New Russian President Vladimir Putin has already upped the nuclear ante by authorizing changes in Russia's military doctrine that would allow it to launch a "first strike" nuclear attack. Anti-nuclear activist Daniel Ellsberg, the former government researcher who leaked the Pentagon Papers, says that may have been the bizarre intention of the Pentagon all along. "In order to advance a domestic political agenda," he says, "the United States is encouraging the Russians to remain on and advance a launch-on-warning system."

It's the old game of escalating threats. The cheerleaders for the new Star Wars system now realize that the "rogue state" threat isn't credible. For one thing, North Korea, nearly crippled by drought and economic isolation, seems ready to consider a rapprochement with the South. Iran, the Pentagon's other favorite devil, doesn't have missiles that could reach the United States. And Iraq, still smoldering from years of unceasing U.S. air strikes, is barely able to maintain its water supply system, never mind construct a fleet of transcontinental ballistic missiles. Even that normally reliable intermediary for U.S. strategic interests, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has publicly voiced his doubts about the new Star Wars scheme, saying it could reignite a global arms race.

Even some unrepentant cold warriors chafed at this chilling dialogue. North Carolina Sen. Jesse Helms, who rules the Foreign Relations Committee, vowed that any changes to the ABM Treaty agreed to by Russia would be "dead on arrival." The Republicans have a political motive to drag their feet. They don't want to give Al Gore a "hawkish" victory on the eve of the election or allow Clinton to add some more military luster to his legacy. "So, Mr. Clinton is in search of a legacy," Helms blustered. "Lade-da—he already has one. The Russian government should not be under any illusion whatsoever that any commitments made by this lame-duck administration will be binding on the next administration."

**T**o top it off, the system doesn't work. There have been two high-profile tests of the Interceptor missile to date. One was an unmitigated failure. The other was initially touted as "a direct kill," but it later emerged that the Pentagon had fixed the test. The next firing is slated for June 26. A few months ago, Defense Secretary William Cohen pointed to this date as a make-it-or-break-it final exam for the program. But now top Pentagon officials are beginning to show signs of test anxiety. "It will depend on what caused the failure," hedges Pentagon spokesman Mike Biddle. "A mechanical failure isn't necessarily terminal."

Even the program's biggest boosters now concede that the missile shield would be all but useless against a nuclear strike launched by Russia, China or, one supposes, France, should Parisians ever seek to retaliate for the crimes of EuroDisney. A newly declassified State Department document, obtained by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, shows that a minimum of four U.S. Interceptors would be needed to "kill" one incoming missile. This means that the entire system would be exhausted trying to down 20 missiles.

The Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Defense Organization projects the cost of the system at \$36 billion, a typically modest appraisal. The Congressional Budget Office has come up with a slightly more robust number of \$60 billion—a figure the government auditors admit is little more than a rough guess, since the administration hasn't yet put forward details on the next two phases of the plan. But even that number was enough to stagger some of the plan's most ardent backers. "That's out of sync with anything I've seen," said Rep. Curt Weldon, the Pennsylvania Republican who chairs the House Armed Services Committee's panel on military research and development. "But you can't put a price tag on protecting American cities."

Despite the dearth of media coverage, the public is beginning to sour on the plan. According to a recent ABC News poll, public support for the Clinton/Gore version of national missile defense is sliding; 44 percent of

Americans support the plan, down from 55 percent in 1985.

So what's driving the bipartisan push for an increasingly unpopular new missile defense system that is extravagant, inept, unnecessary and destabilizing? You don't have to dig very deep to find an answer: Raytheon, TRW, Lockheed Martin and Boeing. Each of these firms has secured a lucrative sector of the Star Wars program.

Of course, the companies do have to make some political offerings. And they haven't been miserly. Together these four companies have flushed more than \$2.6 million to the two political parties in soft money alone since 1996. On top of that, the defense giants' PACs have sluiced \$3.7 million to federal candidates in the past three years, making the Star Wars coalition one of the prime sponsors of our political system. What money can't buy, direct persuasion often can. These four companies spent more than \$18 million lobbying Congress in 1998, sending out a legion of former senators, congressmen and retired Pentagon chieftains as their hired guns on the Hill.

This all gives a bracing new meaning to getting more bang for the buck. ■

**Even the program's  
biggest boosters now  
concede that the missile  
shield would be all but  
useless against a  
nuclear strike.**

# "This is not life. This is prison."

By Richard Mertens

OBILIC, Kosovo

**Y**ou don't need a map to find the Gypsy camp here. You just steer for the big smokestack on the edge of town. It belongs to a coal-fired power plant and can be seen 20 miles away. Nearby, between a dusty, pot-holed road and small hills of ash, is a cluster of wooden barracks. An eight-foot mesh fence surrounds the barracks, topped by two strands of barbed wire. That's the camp.

Eight hundred Gypsies, or Roma, live here. A group of children crowds excitedly around a pool of water that is the color of motor oil. Not far away, women wash clothes in metal basins, standing in ankle-deep mud around a water spigot. The men are doing little, although one sits apart from the others, carving a table leg with a kitchen knife. A tape deck blasts Roma dance music. The air reeks of dirty water and human excrement. Outside the fence, the countryside is turning a rich green; inside there is hardly a blade of grass.

The scene is strangely familiar. Just a year ago, ethnic Albanians were crowding into refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia as they fled Serb terror across the border. There were the same swarms of children, the same trampled earth, the same mixture of boredom, restlessness and despair. The Albanians are back home now. They are rebuilding their ruined houses, trying to hustle a living and enjoying their freedom. They also are creating a whole new class of the persecuted and displaced. Last summer, as the Albanians returned, they drove out the Roma and looted and burned their homes.

The fence is not to keep the Roma in, but to keep other people out. "You see what we have for a future?" asks one man named Ibush Berisha. Until last year, he worked at the power plant; now he is out of both a job and a home. He is 23, and he and his wife and child share a room with his brother's family. He gestures toward an open patch between the barracks. "We have mud and dirt," he says scornfully. "This is not life. This is prison."

**T**he future of ethnic minorities is one of many uncertainties that hang over Kosovo today, more than a year after the NATO bombings. The West has invested enormous amounts of time, money and effort in the ravaged province. So far, the failures stand out more starkly than the successes.

Not everything has gone awry. Thanks in part to Western help, Kosovars made it through the winter. More than 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed at the end of the war last June. In the months that followed, relief agencies handed out huge quantities of food, clothing, wood stoves, blankets, lumber, plastic and other building materials. By this spring, houses all over Kosovo were sporting new roofs.

There is still much to be done: schools and hospitals to be rebuilt, homes to be repaired and replaced, roads to be smoothed. The damage in Kosovo is a result not just of war, but of a decade of neglect. And yet the physical repairs are the easiest part of the job. The West is trying to cobble together a whole social infrastructure, with improved education and health care and public institutions that are suited to democracy and a free market. This work is

all the harder because when the Serb authorities left last spring, they took most of Kosovo's technical and administrative expertise with them.

Still, living under the Serbs made Kosovo's Albanians canny and resourceful. The shops in Pristina abound with goods: French perfumes, German televisions, Turkish tomatoes, Scandinavian cell phones. Along the main roads, construction companies have stockpiled enormous quantities of blocks and roofing tiles in expectation of this year's work.

But Kosovo's Albanians also have become experts at getting around established authority. This is causing problems for Kosovo's U.N. administration as it tries to assert greater control over the province. Most people have refused to pay their electric bills. The black and gray markets are flourishing. More worrisome is growing evidence of smuggling, drug running and other organized crime.

Today's Kosovo has a frontier feeling—energetic, chaotic, sometimes violent. Cars jam the center of Pristina, filling the air with dust and fumes. Among the Yugos and Volkswagens are a surprising number of Mercedes and BMWs, half of them without license plates. Children roam the cafes selling cigarettes and lighters. Litter and garbage are scattered everywhere. Armed robbery is common. Disagreements are sometimes settled with AK-47s.

Slowly—too slowly for many people—the United Nations is trying to impose order. It has issued banking regulations, started

## A year after the NATO bombing, Kosovars struggle to co-exist



a customs service, begun to register businesses and collect taxes. It is paying modest stipends to civil servants, including teachers, doctors and judges. It is training local police officers and restoring postal service. It is beginning to register voters in preparation for fall elections. It recently got the traffic lights in Pristina working again. That was no mean accomplishment.

**B**ut a year after NATO's intervention, the West has been unable to make Kosovo safe for ethnic minorities. Since last summer, ethnic Albanians have been busy erasing reminders of the long Serb presence in Kosovo. Serbian names have been blotted out on the bilingual road signs, Serb churches have been dynamited. Of the Serbs themselves, about half have fled. Of the 100,000 who remain, most live in all-Serb enclaves, cut off from hospitals, schools and markets.

Just over the hills from Pristina lies Gracanica, a Serb village of about 10,000 people. Here the signs are in Cyrillic and the graffiti still proclaims, "Here is Serbia!" But the reality is far bleaker. There are few jobs in Gracanica, and most people fear to travel beyond the military checkpoints at either end of the village. Dragan, a 26-year-old friend of mine, says he sees little sense in staying. Once a computer technician in Pristina, he spends his time playing cards, watching the NBA on television and envying young Albanian men with their big cars, beautiful girlfriends and freedom. "What can I do?" he asks. "My friends have gone away. I think the future is to go to Serbia or somewhere else. For young people there is no future here. I feel like a bird in a cage."

live with the few Serbs who don't have bloody hands," a 20-year-old student named Fitim Ferati says. "But there are just a few of them, believe me."

Besides Serbs, Kosovo has a surprising variety of other ethnic minorities: Roma, Croats, Turks and several groups of Slavic Muslims. Most of them live precariously. The Roma have suffered the most. Some of them have admitted helping Serbs as they looted, burned and killed their way across Kosovo last year. A few have been arrested on suspicion of war crimes. But the innocent suffer along with the guilty. Of an estimated 60,000 Roma who once lived in Kosovo, about 30,000 have fled. Many of the others live in fear. "Almost anyone who can't speak Albanian finds himself in a difficult situation in Kosovo," says Anthony Land, an official of the U.N. refugee agency. "Wherever you go, whatever you do, even buying a pack of cigarettes, you give away the fact that's you're not Albanian. It's like wearing a badge."

**W**estern officials no longer speak of multi-ethnicity in Kosovo. Instead, they promote "co-existence." In practice this amounts to a kind of apartheid. Last year officials tried hard to integrate hospitals, schools and workplaces. Now they are simply trying to give Serbs and other minorities the protection and basic services they need to survive in their enclaves.

It has become risky for an Albanian even to do business with a Serb. Lately, Albanian taxi drivers have been beaten up for giving rides to Serbs. Many Albanians are privately distressed by this turn of events. But few are willing to speak out. Last fall,

Veton Surroi, a prominent editor and publisher, wrote a commentary that criticized the violence against Serbs. Few other Kosovars had the authority to air such views so openly. Surroi not only had published his daily newspaper, *Koha Ditore*, under enormous pressure before the war, he also had remained in hiding in Kosovo throughout the NATO bombing. But for many Kosovars, his criticisms went too far. The news agency of the Kosovo Liberation Army quickly accused him of being a collaborator—an accusation close to a death sentence.

A friend of mine in Pristina, a tolerant and cosmopolitan man, says he had a few Serb friends left in the city but is afraid to be seen as friendly toward them. The city is full of angry young men, many of them former KLA fighters, he explains. He and his wife know a 70-year-old Serb woman who lives in the building next door. "We'd like to help her," he says. "But we're afraid to. We talk to her on the

phone. But we can't go over there. We just can't."

This atmosphere of fear bodes ill not only for the future of ethnic minorities in Kosovo, but for the future of democracy. Kosovo remains at heart an authoritarian society. Kosovars are a mainly rural people, with patriarchal traditions that have all but disappeared in the rest of Europe. The pressure to conform is powerful. In late April, a protest against the



Roma fled to the camp in Obilic after Albanians burned and looted their homes last summer.

Kosovo's Albanians often say that Serbs who are innocent of war crimes—those with "clean hands," the saying goes—are welcome to stay. This sounds good, but in practice it never seems to work. Most of the truly guilty fled long ago, before NATO arrived. But to the Albanian way of thinking, almost all Serbs are guilty, if only because they did nothing to stop those who committed the crimes. "We would like to

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imprisonment of ethnic Albanians in Serbia shut down the center of Pristina for three days. Many shop owners kept their businesses closed, less in solidarity with the protesters than from fear of what might happen if they didn't.

Only some of the violence in Kosovo is ethnically motivated. The Albanians' long struggle against the Serbs is turning into an internal struggle for money and power. In places like Vitina, a trouble spot for U.S. peacekeepers, most crime happens not between Serbs and Albanians but among the Albanians themselves. So far neither the NATO-led peacekeepers nor the United Nations has been able to establish effectively the rule of law in Kosovo. The peacekeepers complain that they are not trained for police work; the United Nations complains it has too few police.

Perhaps more grave is the failure of the court system. Indeed, today's Kosovo is a product of failed justice, or at least of justice deferred. The killing of thousands of ethnic Albanians during NATO's bombing has so far gone unpunished. Within Kosovo, 40 people, mostly Serbs, have been arrested for war crimes, but none has been tried. Nor have Albanians been punished for crimes against ethnic minorities. "It's a huge problem," says Rolf Welberts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which oversees Kosovo's courts. "A climate of impunity exists."

After months of delay, a local court system finally has started working. But it has serious shortcomings. "Where the victim is Serb or Roma, the defendant, regardless of the severity of the charge, has always been released," says David Marshall, a legal expert. "And the reverse is true. When Serbs have been charged, whatever the crime, they're not released."

Of 276 judges and prosecutors, only two are Serbs. Because of the risks involved, few non-Albanian judges are willing to serve. Western officials have little confidence that Kosovar judges can deliver fair verdicts in ethnically sensitive cases. Instead, they plan to bring in international judges to help try these cases, including war crimes. The first trials could be held in June.

**O**f course, as long as Slobodan Milosevic, the architect of so much bloodshed in the Balkans, remains firmly in power, any regional stability is impossible. Montenegro, on Kosovo's northwest border, teeters on the edge of war with Serbia. Kosovo's southern neighbor, Macedonia, with its large ethnic Albanian minority, remains as ethnically divided as ever.

Although his army and police are banished from Kosovo, Milosevic continues to stir up trouble from afar. American officials have blamed his police for fomenting violence in Mitrovica, but the Milosevic regime exerts its influence throughout Kosovo. Serbian state television and newspapers spread anti-Western propaganda among Kosovo's Serbs. Many of them also continue to receive benefits from the Yugoslav government, including pensions and health care. Civil servants, including doctors and teachers, continue to receive their salaries, even if they no longer have their jobs. In these ways, Milosevic is able to undermine not only Western efforts in Kosovo, but the efforts of moderate Serb leaders. These leaders, who include officials of the Serb Orthodox Church in Kosovo, have shown a willingness to work with the West but have little influence among ordinary Serbs.

Lately the West has been trying to help. It has been unable to deliver what the Serbs desire most, which is the freedom to

## Bosnian Serbs Still Look to Belgrade

By Paul Hockenos

BANJA LUKA, BOSNIA

**I**nto the early morning hours, the songs of Ceca, Dragana Mirkovic or any one of Serbia's multitude of "turbofolk" stars resonate from Banja Luka's jam-packed nightclubs.

The Bosnian Serbs who live in this tree-lined Hapsburg city, now the capital of Bosnia's Serb entity, Republika Srpska, know every pop hit from Serbia proper, every player on Belgrade's Red Star soccer team, and at weddings they proudly brandish the red, blue and white Serb flag. Television signals, black-market trade and, not least, political influence transcend Serbia's western border.

Bosnian Serbs retain strong ties with neighboring Serbia, even though the 1995 Dayton peace agreement dashed their wartime goal to merge with the Yugoslav state. Most of Bosnia's nearly 1.5 million Orthodox Christian Serbs have come to accept, albeit grudgingly, that they will remain part of Bosnia for the foreseeable future. Yet the issues associated with the Serb national cause dominate political discourse here, and have ultimately hampered the implementation of the four-and-a-half-year, multibillion-dollar peace process. "The idea of a Serbian state, of Serbhood in Bosnia Herzegovina never really died," explains Pedrag Bauovic, a local media consultant. "The concept of Bosnia as one united country hasn't really ever taken hold here."

In election after election, Bosnian Serb voters hand victories to extreme nationalist parties whose leaders are indicted for war crimes

or are regularly removed by the international peace mission's chief administrator for obstructionist tactics. The April 8 municipal elections issued victories across Republika Srpska to the former party of wartime Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, who is wanted by the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Despite the strongest showings to date of moderate Serb parties, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) received the most votes in 52 of 61 municipalities, results which are widely considered a blow to international efforts here.

The Serb entity's political elite has fought the international peace effort almost every step of the way. Hardline nationalists have blocked or stalled international initiatives to bring the two halves of Bosnia together through joint governing institutions, free trade and travel, and a common hard currency. But even the moderate government of Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, handpicked by the international community, has procrastinated when it comes to pushing through substantive reforms. "Dodik has delivered a lot less than he promised," says James Hooper, Balkan coordinator for the International Crisis Group, a watchdog organization. "The Bosnian Serb political elite has implemented only what the international community has compelled it to implement."

That said, all is not as it was five years ago in the bitter aftermath of the war. A flourishing independent media exists, while state-run tele-



move safely throughout Kosovo. But it is helping the moderate Serbs set up a radio station, which will allow them to broadcast throughout the province, and making a greater effort to give the Serbs better medical care and schooling. More controversially, it is helping Serb leaders plan the return of some Serbs to their homes. "It's important to be able to demonstrate that there are other Serbs willing to help them," says one Western diplomat. "They don't just have to depend on Belgrade."

A few Albanian politicians also have cautiously supported—"in principle"—the return of Serbs. American officials took heart when Januz Januzaj, an ethnic Albanian

leader in northwestern Kosovo, welcomed their suggestion that Serbs be allowed to return to an abandoned village near the town of Istok, perhaps as early as June. But others in Istok were less enthusiastic. When asked later about the American plan, Januzaj grimaced like a man who had suddenly taken ill. "The people are very much against the return of Serbs," he said mournfully.

For the Roma, prospects of going home may be better. On April 12, after meeting with their Roma counterparts in Pristina, Albanian leaders publicly affirmed the right of the Roma to live in Kosovo, and they promised to visit Roma communities as a gesture of good faith. Such a meeting was unthinkable six months ago.

But there is still a long way to go. At the Roma camp in Obilic, people say they want to go home but have little hope it will happen any time soon.

Zoj Maroli, a 36-year-old mother of five, says she would like to leave Kosovo for five or 10 years and then come back. "I'm afraid to go back now," she says. "It is not safe."

She did leave once, months ago. An aid worker drove her to a Roma neighborhood in Pristina that angry Albanians had destroyed last summer. They parked in front of her house. "I didn't get out of the car," she says. "I just looked at my house and came back here. Everything was stolen or burned. To me, it was better to be dead than to see that." ■



**Kosovar Albanians throw rocks and bottles at French riot police on the bridge across the Ibar River in Mitrovica.**

vision, under close international scrutiny, has noticeably tempered its tone. Private cars, public buses and commercial lorries criss-cross former frontlines unimpeded. Basketball and soccer teams now regularly compete against opponents from the other entity, the Muslim-Croat Federation. And individual Bosnian Serbs have begun to set aside the hatreds and exaggerated stereotypes that fueled the war.

Even most hardline politicians, like those in the SDS, now endorse the peace process, including paying lip-service to Serb participation in the Bosnian state. One obvious reason for this abrupt change in attitude is international stipulations that prohibit parties that oppose the peace plan. Over the past year, international administrators have removed Bosnian Serb authorities from official positions and banned several political parties from participating in the local elections. But the nationalists' new cooperative tone leaves some critics unimpressed. "They obviously haven't changed overnight," says Natasha Tesanovic, director of the independent Alternative Television. "The simple fact is that they're always under the scrutiny of the international community. One wrong step and you can be removed from the political scene."

The legacy of the war remains a sensitive and emotional issue. Most Bosnian Serbs justify the "homeland war" as righteous and necessary, as an ultimately defensive measure to rescue Serbs from an Islamic state. The Serbs inevitably see themselves as victims of the war, ethnic cleansing and international conspiracies. For them,

the world is divided into countries that are "pro-Serb," like Russia and Greece, and enemies of their nation, like the United States, Germany and Turkey.

One of the stickiest issues is the return of Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat refugees to their former homes, a key principle of the peace accords. So far, only a trickle of minority refugees have been repatriated. "The same, or in most cases similar, people are in power as during the war," says Franjo Komarica, Banja Luka's Catholic archbishop, a leading champion of human rights in the region. "It's not in the least surprising that they're resisting refugee return. Now they say what the international community wants to hear in order to get money, but they do nothing."

At every turn, Bosnian Serb officials attempt to block or delay the process, and politically motivated violence against returnees is commonplace. Vesna Ljubicic, a 21-year-old economics student, complains, "Now [the refugees] are coming back. We will have the same situation as before the war. So what were all the war victims for?"

There are still strong political links between Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and leading Bosnian Serb politicians, particularly in the SDS. Among most Bosnian Serbs, there is no love lost for Milosevic, whom they accuse of selling them out at Dayton. But Milosevic or not, Belgrade remains their point of orientation. And as long as Milosevic can pull strings in Republika Srpska, international administrators here face an uphill struggle. ■

KAEALFORD

THE SHADOW OF  
**Poverty in America**

# Turning the Tables

## Welfare reform faces a time limit of its own

By Neil deMause

**H**omeless shelters overflowing in Broward County, Florida. An increase of poor children seized from their families by protective services in Utah. Poverty rates up 200 percent in Springfield, Massachusetts. Stories like these are piling up in the fourth year since President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, better known as "welfare reform."

Five million people have been dropped from the welfare rolls since then, leaving far too many deep in poverty. "In a time of plenty, you don't hear a lot about this sort of thing," says Jackie Ladd of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, one of a growing number of groups launching national campaigns to turn welfare reform around. "You just hear the numbers are down. That's it. But while getting a job is great, it doesn't mean you can support a family."

The end of "welfare as we know it" came with an expiration date: October 1, 2002. By then—five years to the day after states were required to have new welfare policies in place—Congress will decide whether to reauthorize the existing law or replace it. With this in mind, grassroots welfare activist groups are focusing their local battles on a national target: reauthorization.

**W**hen President Clinton handed over control of welfare policy to the states in 1996, he did more than dismantle a 60-year-old federal safety net. He made "welfare reform" a moving target, with states running their own distinct welfare programs, each with its own tangle of regulations and requirements. "It put us all into our individual worlds of crisis," says Kate Kahan of Montana's Working for Equality and Economic Liberation (WEEL). "We don't have similar welfare programs anymore. Some of our states even have county-by-county welfare programs."

To help combat this confusing melange, groups in seven Western states, including WEEL, formed the Western Regional Welfare Activist Network (WRWAN) in 1997 to serve as an information and strategy clearinghouse. Last July, WRWAN officially declared welfare reauthorization as its main focus. Among the targets: lifetime benefit time limits set at five years nationally, but lowered to as little as 21 months in some states; denial of benefits to immigrants;

and grant levels that fail to even approach the meager sums of the AFDC era. "Particularly in the northwestern states, where you have both a rural population and an urban population, people get lost," Kahan says. Child poverty is up, she reports, as is attendance at food banks and shelters. "All of that indicates that poverty is way too deep."

What WRWAN is doing for the Northwest, the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support intends to do on the national level (see "Allied Forces," page 17). A coalition of 100 groups in more than 40 states, spearheaded by the Washington-based Center for Community Change, the campaign's focus is to "advance a progressive agenda" in the coming welfare debate, according to campaign director Deepak Bhargava. "We're trying



A single mother at Hamilton Family Shelter in San Francisco.

to establish a dynamic where the best work that folks are doing at the state level becomes the model for federal policy," he says, "and the worst stuff that's happening gets some visibility so there's a case for making changes at the federal level."

First up for the campaign: a national day of action this summer focusing on access to health care for the working poor and immigrants. "There really has been an upsurge in organizing among low-wage workers," Bhargava adds. "Doing this nationally five years ago would have been unimaginable."



It's not every day you see the president of the state AFL-CIO testifying how he got where he is today because of welfare. But at the March 24 kickoff of the "Welfare Made a Difference" campaign, Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Bobby Haynes told of how he'd risen from poverty with the help of government programs, from the GI Bill to public housing to welfare. "I can't imagine, in my wildest dreams, having that happen if you grew up in the '90s," he said.

Beneath a spray of colorful balloons stenciled with the campaign's motto, a procession of people, from elected officials to regular civilians, trooped to the microphone to tell their stories. Susan Moir, who works at the University of Massachusetts, noted that since entering the paid work force she has given the state four times in taxes what she received in her years on welfare. "I'm doing better than the stock market," she said. "I'm one of the best investments this state has made in its citizens."

Working Massachusetts, the group behind the campaign, began in a meeting of the women's committee of the state AFL-CIO, says Sharron Tetrault of the Women's Statewide Legislative Network: "They went around the room, and with one exception, everyone in the room had been on welfare themselves. And they realized, 'Welfare saved our lives.' And they brought this to the state AFL-CIO and said, 'This is labor's issue. It's not a separate issue; it's our issue.'"

"Welfare Made a Difference" plans to spread stories of people's experiences with welfare via speakouts, lobbying and a published collection of stories. The campaign now involves 80 groups across the country, says national organizer Liz Accles of New York's Community Food Resource Center. The goal of the campaign, she says, is to "challenge the notion that if you provide welfare, you're doing bad things to people. We're trying to say if you do it and do it well, the government could eliminate poverty."

"Statistics, in my experience, never change the way people think," Tetrault adds. "Stories alone don't either, because people say, 'Oh, you're the most amazing welfare recipient out there! You're special!' But when they come together, all of a sudden people start noticing the ways in which welfare, and welfare recipients, and welfare policies have a direct impact on their lives."

One of the most frustrating elements of welfare reform for activists has been the dearth of solid information on the effects of the new policies. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which replaced the old welfare program, not only turned over control of welfare programs to the states, notes Eileen Sweeney of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, it turned over tracking as well. The result has been a hodgepodge of unrelated studies that have shed little light on the well-being of former welfare recipients.

What national data have been collected is not encouraging. A report by the Urban

Institute on the early impacts of welfare reform found that up to half of women who've left the rolls report serious problems feeding their families. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that the poorest 20 percent of single-mother families, after years of rising income, saw their incomes plummet between 1995 and 1997 as welfare reform kicked in. The poorest tenth lost a seventh of their incomes, which dropped from 35 percent to 30 percent of the poverty line.

To fill in the information gaps, activists have been conducting their own studies. Jackie Ladd's Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project is one of several nationwide efforts being brought together under the umbrella of the National Welfare Monitoring and Advocacy Partnership. Her findings paint a picture unlike the success stories that populate the mainstream media: welfare rules that conflict with each other or openly sabotage recipients' efforts to comply, abuse victims who are revictimized by the welfare system, and work requirements that force them to quit school. "And finally," Ladd says, "we found that the jobs available, when forced off of welfare by time limits, didn't allow them to become self-sufficient."

The Washington Welfare Reform Coalition's "Reality Check Survey," released last year, echoes Ladd's findings. People who left welfare in that state were earning a median

# Allied Forces

By Ted Kleine

On May 6, the front-page of the *Chicago Tribune* boasted, "Jobless rate at a 30-year low." That same morning, a thousand poor folks and their allies gathered in the ballroom of the Chicago Hilton and Towers to provide a subhead to the story: A lot of those new jobs don't pay the bills.

The event was the founding convention of the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, a coalition of 100 grassroots poverty organizations in more than 40 states, which aims to win health benefits and a living wage for workers who've been shunted off welfare and into low-paying jobs. "The world's wealthiest country allows hundreds of thousands of full-time workers to live in poverty even though they work 40 hours a week," Illinois Rep. Luis Gutierrez told a hometown crowd. "I am going to make sure that in America, we stop talking about minimum wage and start talking about living wage."

Gutierrez is preparing to introduce the Federal Living Wage Responsibility Act, which would require all companies with a federal contract to pay workers enough to meet the poverty level for a family of four—currently \$8.20 an hour. "The corporations are earning a handsome profit from the federal treasury," Gutierrez said, and it's time they shared some of it with the 21 percent of blacks and the 32 percent of Latinos who work full time and still live in poverty. He said the bill would give a raise to about 900,000 workers.

Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone, who also spoke at the convention, will introduce a companion living-wage bill in the Senate. This summer Wellstone also plans to sponsor the Health Security For All Americans Act, which would provide "universal health care for everyone in America."

The two legislators are carrying water for the coalition, which charges that once welfare reform was enacted in 1996, companies inherited a pool of desperate workers they could treat like serfs. A large number of former welfare recipients are working, but they're working part time for \$6 an hour with no benefits. "[Welfare reform] definitely

wage of just \$7 an hour (\$6 an hour for part-timers); even full-time workers often had difficulty paying for groceries and utilities. And conditions appeared to be getting worse as more and more families were forced off welfare: During the first year of TANF implementation in Washington State, families who had gone without food increased from 27 percent to 43 percent, and those with no health coverage rose from 30 percent to 45 percent.

**S**o far welfare really hasn't been an issue in this year's election campaigns. While the architects of the 1996 bill push for even stricter standards, candidates have remained mum, save for the occasional one-upsmanship between Al Gore and George W. Bush over who cut more people from the rolls. "I

don't think it's on many radar screens in the House," says Stuart Campbell of the Washington, D.C.-based Coalition on Human Needs. "There's a general perception that we dealt with that in 1996, why is it an issue again?"

Complicating matters is that plummeting caseloads have left many states racking up huge TANF surpluses, or even diverting welfare money to offset spending on other budget items. "It looks pretty damn good superficially," Kahan worries. "All these states have all this TANF surplus money, and

Congress could easily look at that and say, we don't need to allocate as much money to these states."

One goal of the new welfare campaigns is to change all that. WRWAN has sponsored public hearings in Montana and has more planned for other states. Bhargava says the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support anticipates holding candidate forums in as many as 50 cities, challenging prospective members of Congress to respond to concerns about deepening poverty.

The welfare reauthorization fight promises to be a battle on many fronts: time limits, education, child care, health care—not to mention even more divisive goals like wages for

## **As long as we continue to blame people who are poor for being poor, we're dismantling our society.**

stay-at-home moms and ending workfare outright. But the first step, organizers agree, is to change attitudes toward the poor. "The fundamental idea behind welfare reform is that poverty is personal responsibility: Poverty is an individual problem, it's your fault if you're poor," Kahan says. "But poverty is not an individual problem, it's a systemic problem. We need to shift the way we're talking about it, because as long as we continue to blame people who are poor for being poor, we're dismantling our society." ■

had the systematic result of lowering wages," says John Donahue, executive director of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, one of the groups represented at the convention. "It's really corporate welfare, because they are lining the pockets of corporations by allowing them to hire low-wage workers who don't get benefits."

At midday, the convention broke for a march to the James R. Thompson Center, a state government office building. The subject of the demonstration was KidCare, a child health insurance program that was founded in 1997 but still reaches less than a third of eligible children. The demonstrators claim that Illinois has underpublicized the program and made it too difficult for families to enroll. Children who sign up for reduced school lunch programs, day care subsidies, or the state nutrition program should automatically be enrolled in KidCare, they say. "Only 95,000 of the 337,000 children who qualify are enrolled in KidCare," says Denise Dixon, president of the Chicago chapter of ACORN.

Eric Robinson, a spokesman for the Illinois Department of Public Aid challenges the group's numbers on KidCare. A study by the University of Illinois-Chicago estimates that only 190,000 children are eligible for the program, he says. Of those, 101,000 have been enrolled. In the past year, Robinson adds, the state has signed up 70,000 children by running radio spots, putting ads on buses and trains, and sending home information with report cards in Chicago public schools. A \$1.6 million outreach program has targeted rural residents and immigrants. "We're reaching out to the state's neediest people," he says.

Among the marchers was Gerald Stainbrook of Chicago, who recently enrolled his nephew in KidCare. The boy was suffering from headaches, and the only place the family could take him was Cook County Hospital, far from home. Stainbrook, a part-

time health care worker, found out about the program through his union, Service Employees Local 880. "There are no applications in the schools," he says. "It's not well publicized." Yet once his nephew signed up for the program, it still took another "two or three months" to get him a card.

Back at the conference, the campaign released one of its first position papers, "Access Denied." It charges that since states were given control of welfare, their programs have been characterized by "pervasive lawlessness and a culture of indifference, arbitrariness and intimidation." In 1994, 72 percent of those eligible for food stamps were receiving them; by 1998, it was down to 56 percent. Medicaid and child care subsidies are also underused. In many cases, it's because the states don't tell applicants about their rights, or force them to go through "needlessly long and cumbersome application processes" to receive benefits. Some states have even been using federal welfare money to fund tax cuts.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney cited "Access Denied" in his keynote speech at the convention. "It is shameful that in the midst of the greatest economic boom in the history of our country, poor families and working poor families are being denied the benefits that shield them from despair," Sweeney said. "It is disgraceful that states with their tax coffers overflowing are using the flexibility they begged for to withhold food stamps, Medicaid and child care from families who deserve them."

Welfare reform is up for reauthorization in 2002, and the campaign hopes to get the law rewritten. Among the changes they'd like to see: access to benefits for legal immigrants and documentation of whether people are treated with dignity when they request benefits. "The last time, we reacted to their bad proposals," Donahue adds. "This time, we're going to do the recommending." ■



THE SHADOW OF  
**Poverty in America**

# Poverty in a Gilded Age

## Annette Fuentes interviews Frances Fox Piven

In 1971, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward wrote *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, a definitive study of welfare policies in the United States. Their radical approach cast public-relief programs as forms of social and labor market control, served up at times of unrest and mass organizing and retrenched during upswings in the economy. This analysis of 30 years ago was an uncanny predictor of the 1996 demise of welfare and the rise of punitive measures such as workfare.

Since then, Piven and Cloward have published five other works, including *Why Americans Don't Vote* (1988) and *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (1997). Their latest collaboration, *Why Americans Still Don't Vote*, will be published this September by Beacon Press. Piven currently teaches at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

*In the three decades since you first wrote about the poor, what have been the most significant changes in the nature of poverty?*

For one thing, there are more poor Americans today than there were in 1970, so poverty has worsened in the United States. And extreme poverty has worsened in the last few years as the number of people living at half the poverty level has grown.

The official poverty line is \$13,000 for a family of three. The poverty line was invented by a woman named Mollie Orshansky, who worked for the federal government in the '60s. She estimated the cost of a basket of basic foodstuffs, multiplied it by three, and added estimates of what rent, transportation and other necessary things cost.

Now, we still do that, take the cost of a market basket and multiple it by three. But what has changed are rents and

medical costs, for example, which have inflated more than food has. So if you want to match the real poverty level today, you'd have to multiply by five. It would have to be \$19,500 to meet the real need, and that raises the number who would be [counted as] poor if you adjusted line.

The most alarming trend is the increase in the number of poor children. Even with a roaring economy, one fifth of children are poor.

*In the '80s, the term "feminization of poverty" became the catchphrase to neatly identify the exponential growth of poor women heads of households. What's the current trend?*

The new phrase is "the working poor," the discovery that even though a two-parent family is working some 300 hours more a year than they did 20 years ago, they're still poor.

*The working poor explode the myth that the answer to poverty is always and simply a job, don't they?*

We've witnessed serious changes for people at the bottom of the labor force. There are many more temporary or contract workers, and all workers are worried about their jobs, making them less able to use their bargaining power.

What Richard and I have argued for three decades is that there's a relation between income support programs and public policy. When income support is more generous workers have more leverage and are not as worried. When income supports expanded in the '70s, they were the most generous in their history. But since then, they've been rolled back. Culturally and symbolically, the most important has been the rollback in welfare programs.



In Evansville, Indiana, Crystal Love works an all-night shift as a dishwasher, then returns home for a few hours sleep, rising around midday to spend time with her two children.

The campaign against welfare has created heated rhetoric about the damage welfare did—leading people into dependency, encouraging young women to have children out of wedlock—and held women up as images of derelict people. The rollback makes people more miserable in a material sense and also makes the status of being a pauper much more horrifying.

It's a campaign that bubbles. It never disappeared from American political culture. There were always efforts to attack welfare recipients and welfare, usually on the same grounds: that welfare caused poverty, that welfare caused laziness, that welfare caused sexual immorality. The same sorts of arguments were made in England in the 1830s.

But these arguments became much more shrill and loud in the 1990s, primarily because President Clinton jumped on the bandwagon. Welfare practices also became much more degrading. In New York, when they first introduced workfare, they made the welfare recipients who were assigned to carry garbage cans around the city and pick up trash wear orange Day-Glo jackets, which bears an eerie similarity to the branding of paupers at the close of the Middle Ages.

*Or to prison work crews, which often wear orange jumpsuits and do road work. I'm sure that many workfare participants do feel like prisoners.*

Welfare recipients are in an excruciatingly difficult position. On the one hand, they are very politically and culturally vulnerable. And there is a tendency for them to accept, at least on the surface, the definitions deployed against them. They need support to assert what they also believe, which is that the work they do, taking care of their children, and sometimes disabled family members, is worthwhile. And when everyone is against them, they shrink from those arguments, and instead tell reporters that they're really glad for workfare.

*At least those are the quotes reporters use in their stories. How do you rate media coverage of poverty and related issues?*

I don't think there is any coverage. If you watch television, the issue has completely disappeared and that's where most people get their news. It's because the poor are quiet, and when the poor are quiet nobody pays attention to them. The reason they're quiet is that they were so isolated by the campaign against welfare, which was also a campaign against poor women. And people sensed their own vulnerability. The other reason they were quiet is that the attacks on welfare had been occurring sporadically for 25 years. I suppose that a lot of women had come to believe [the dismantling] would never happen, although the program had been steadily worsening in those years because grant levels were whittled away by inflation. They didn't know whether to believe it.

The reason for the relative lack of activism among poor women in the last couple of decades is this sense of vulnerability and isolation. Under those conditions, when you feel the political system has really turned against you, women opt for individual strategies of survival. But maybe that will change.

*In Regulating the Poor, you identified cycles of government relief programs that waxed and waned in response to civil unrest and protests, with welfare regulations becoming more stringent during cycles of relative economic prosperity. It certainly seems we're at the pinnacle of the draconian stage with the kind of workfare rules that operate in New York, for example.*

New York is pretty terrible, but it's true across the country. It's even worse in places like Mississippi, where welfare recipients are thrown into the chicken and catfish processing plants and the welfare department is paying most of their wages. When I was down there about a year and half ago, the manager of a catfish processing plant announced to the press that he was happy to say the welfare department had assured him they would not give welfare to anyone who was fired from the plant. The welfare department is working hand-in-hand with low-wage employers.

I think we are at the pinnacle—or the trough—of the repressive cycle, and there are some signs that women are coming together and organizing. It's happening in localities. The big change in welfare law is that the federal government defaulted on responsibilities it had acquired over 50 years for supervising state and local administration. Much of the organizing at state and local levels involves women trying to get modest improvements that would, for example, allow them to go to college or finish high school. Now they can do that, but there's a one-year limit. Also, they are trying to organize against the cut-off. And they've had some modest success in New York organizing against workfare. They want jobs, not workfare.

When everybody else is quiet, poor women are reluctant to be out front because they're so exposed and vulnerable. But a lot of things are happening now. The campuses are really boiling. There were the big demonstrations in Seattle and Washington, D.C. The street demonstrations in New York over police brutality. In that kind of environment, women take courage and think they can find allies.

*It was interesting that during the April protests in Washington against the IMF and World Bank, global poverty was one of the key issues activists articulated.*

If you puzzle over whether there's an issue that unifies these diverse protests, the issue you come to again and again is the economic injustices generated by corporate domination. Students on campuses quickly connect labor conditions of people working on their campuses—the janitors—with their sweatshop campaigns. The moral connection is very similar. They also see how sweatshop labor in the Third World is used against the American poor, especially the working poor.

*You can't talk about poverty without talking about wealth, and today that is pretty much all that we hear about: soaring incomes for all. Who wants to talk about poverty?*

We've been through periods like this before in the United States in the 1890s and the 1920s, when dominant images of the American economy and society were golden images of champagne and jazz, the lush life of the Fitzgeralds. But at the same time that was happening in the '20s, for example, entire industries were devastated by downturns in employment in the coal and textile industries. Lots of people were desperately poor even in the Roaring '20s, but nobody paid attention. That changed overnight with the crash of 1929. People tried to organize coal workers in the '20s, but they didn't succeed. Once the cultural understandings of what was going on were reversed, they succeeded big time. It's true we haven't paid much attention to poverty in this particular gilded age, but it is changing. ■



## THE SHADOW OF Poverty in America

# Out of Sight

**In many cities, being homeless is against the law**

**By Kari Lydersen**

**W**hen the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released an intensive, three-year study on homelessness in December, it proved what the homeless themselves have long known: Homelessness will continue to plague this country as long as cities fail to provide adequate shelter and social services.

The study, which involved the efforts of 12 federal agencies and thousands of interviews, showed that approximately 2 million people are homeless at some point during any

offering drug and alcohol treatment and job counseling, a large percentage succeed in finding permanent housing. "Homeless people are locked out of America's prosperity, but we have the key that can let them in," HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo said. "Assistance programs can replace the nightmare of homelessness with the American dream of a better future."

The "key" to helping the homeless rests in the hands of city governments. But instead of looking for real solutions, politi-

cians all over the country are more concerned with maintaining an image of prosperity. Playing down the homeless problem means finding new ways to "clean up" the homeless, whether by police action or through more subtle maneuvers.

**N**ew York Mayor Rudy Giuliani has become infamous for his overzealous prosecution of "quality-of-life" violations, ranging from jay-walking to public drinking. Even tourists and wealthy residents have been arrested in the crack-down, but it is the homeless who bear the brunt of Giuliani's law-and-order mentality. In November, he threatened to arrest anyone sleeping in the street, say-

ing "Streets do not exist in civilized societies for the purpose of people sleeping there. Bedrooms are for sleeping."

Giuliani is far from alone. San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, who promised to address homelessness in a meaningful way in his first campaign in 1995, has earned scathing criticism for his attempts to evict the homeless from Golden Gate Park. Last summer the city budget passed with an extra \$250,000 allotted for prosecution of quality-of-life offenses. These funds will be used against homeless people charged with infractions like sleeping or urinating in public and possessing open containers of alcohol. Police harassment of the



Unable to pay rent on the meager wages he earns as a day laborer, Larry Barnes spends his nights on the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority's Route 22 bus. The only bus in the county that offers 24-hour service, No. 22 is a warm place for many homeless people.

given year, a third of whom had slept on the street or in some other public place within the last week. Families are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population, and more working people are becoming homeless because of rising housing costs and a lack of living-wage jobs. Two-thirds of the homeless suffer from chronic or infectious diseases, and 39 percent are mentally ill.

HUD offered one positive spin on the information: When the homeless do hook up with social service organizations



DONNA BINDER/IMPACT VISUALS

**A homeless family in Phoenix.**

homeless in San Francisco has been stepped up over the past two months, with five times more sleeping-in-public citations issued in March than in previous months. "[Brown] has given up on doing anything to solve the problem," says Adam Arms, a staff attorney at the San Francisco Coalition for the Homeless. "He's just leaving it to the police to sweep them away so they're out of sight."

Chicago has also taken steps to criminalize the homeless. Last winter, the city made controversial sweeps of homeless encampments on Lower Wacker Drive, throwing out the belongings of homeless people who had been congregating by the heating vents on the covered downtown roadway. The city then fenced off the places where people had been living.

Now, in the wake of several highly publicized crimes on the "el" trains, Chicago plans to remove the homeless from late-night public transportation. The city says aid stations will be set up at the end of the all-night Red Line to refer homeless people to shelters and other services. While advocates for the homeless say this aid is a good thing, but barring the homeless from getting back on the trains is a gross violation of their civil rights. "They originally announced the policy as a homeless removal program, and that's what it is," says John Donahue, executive director of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. "It was only when we began to advocate against it that they started saying they would just be offering services. Well if you're just offering services, you don't need a press conference with the police there, talking about violence on the CTA."

The Coalition for the Homeless is especially incensed at the city's criminalization of homeless people on the trains, given the shooting death of Arthur Earl Hutchinson, a homeless man, earlier this spring. Hutchinson was shot by a Chicago police officer outside a train station after he was seen acting erratically on the train; the officer chased Hutchinson into an alley before shooting him, claiming he thought Hutchinson had a weapon. He was found holding a fork.

Other cities have created similar ways to criminalize their homeless populations. Keeping up military-style operations it perfected during the 1996 Olympics, Atlanta has been conducting regular sweeps to remove people from under downtown bridges. Officials there also distribute photos of homeless people they have labeled "habitual drinkers" to liquor stores. In Tucson, Arizona, city officials have attempted to privatize sidewalks in downtown business districts so business owners can legally deny access to homeless people.

Even efforts by homeless people to improve their situation have been thwarted by city governments and police. When Seattle closed 130 shelter beds on March 31, the official end of winter, more than 50 homeless people set up their own tent city in a meadow on the south side of the city. Strict rules against alcohol, drugs, fighting and profanity governed the community, and neighbors were impressed with its atmosphere, according to local newspapers. The encampment was on private land owned by a sympathetic landlord, but the city government was determined to close the tents down. Mayor Paul Schell decided to enforce zoning codes that prohibited that many people from sleeping on the owner's land, and



threatened to fine him \$75 a day until the campers were gone. On April 25, the day the fines were to take effect, the campers moved to a new location, where the cycle may start over again. "They're managing to zone the city so the homeless aren't permitted anywhere," says Claude "Cowboy" Nalls, a resident of the tent community. "The only way we can survive is by sticking together like this, but the city wants to disperse us. Then we'll be under viaducts or in the woods, where all kinds of harm can come to you."

**O**rganizing efforts by the homeless may become harder to shun as the dangerous combination of welfare reform, a nationwide affordable housing crunch and more exclusionary shelter plans promises to increase the homeless population.

Employees at shelters around the country say they have seen numbers of homeless people needing shelter go up in direct response to welfare cuts. The effects of welfare reform will continue to snowball over the next few years as people reach their time limit on the public aid rolls. Many people kicked off welfare fail to get any kind of work at all, and those who do succeed in getting jobs are likely to have such low wages that they may still become homeless.

Public housing redevelopment in many cities promises to put thousands more out on the street. In Chicago, nearly 16,000 units of public housing are slated to be destroyed over the next five years. But numerous studies have shown that enough affordable housing for those who qualify for government subsidies just isn't there. The Chicago public housing plan also includes a get-tough approach on tenants that could leave many with no housing if they have any minor drug violations or are late with their rent.

Likewise, San Francisco has decided to start implementing a policy to make it easier to evict elderly and disabled low-income tenants who "pose a health and safety hazard to their neighbors." The policy stipulates that inspectors can issue tickets to residents at 22 of the agency's assisted-living projects for minor infractions including "tolerance of unhealthy conditions." A one-strike policy for possession of drugs, firearms and even dogs is another part of this plan.

In Silicon Valley, the cradle of out-of-control dot-com wealth, the housing crunch has gotten so bad that even people working two jobs have taken to sleeping on the area's few all-night buses. In February the *New York Times* reported that even professionals making more than \$50,000 a year are turning to homeless shelters. Conditions are similar in the Pacific Northwest. "We have a very overheated economy because of all this high-tech stuff," says Tim Harris, director of the street newspaper *Real Change* in Seattle. "It's getting harder and harder for anyone who's not a yuppie to afford rent anywhere."

While the need for shelters is becoming greater, the number and accessibility of shelter beds continues to decrease. Under San Francisco's new shelter plan, the homeless must pay for their beds. Those on public aid will have the cost deducted from their benefits, signing away all but about \$60 of their monthly checks if they stay in the shelter full time. Under the new plan, only 255 of San Francisco's 1,520 shelter beds would be available for people not receiving welfare, even though nearly 70 percent of the more than 14,000 homeless in the city fall into that category. Of those 255 beds, only 50 would be reserved for women. And while the homeless would be effectively paying rent for the shelter, they

would have no tenancy rights and would still be subject to the shelters' strict rules. As of early May, it was still unclear whether and how the plan will be implemented, given the intense criticism from the community.

Last year Chicago proposed a similar centralized shelter plan. Critics say the plan, which has yet to be implemented, will further decrease the number of people receiving shelter and services. Women who are fleeing domestic abuse—a large segment of the female homeless population—say the centralized intake center would mean their abuser would know exactly where to find them. Undocumented immigrants, already grossly underserved by homeless services, would be even more wary of visiting the centralized centers. "Latino homeless people already face numerous obstacles to getting shelter, because of cultural and language barriers and racism in the shelters," says Jose Landaverde, a leader of the Latino Task Force Against Homelessness in Chicago. "And if they're undocumented they're nervous about being deported. This plan makes it even worse because they are even less likely to go to a shelter if it's not in their neighborhood."

**M**ost advocates agree that city governments can begin to address the homelessness problem only by turning away from the criminalization approach in favor of a cooperative model involving various sectors of the community. In particular, they say governments should turn to and help finance nonprofit housing, substance abuse treatment, and job training agencies, instead of trying to tackle the problem by themselves.

Thresholds, a city-funded private organization in Chicago that offers intense one-on-one service to the mentally ill, is one group that is taking a proactive approach to homelessness. Advocates also point to church-based programs such as the Night Ministry as effective service providers. Homeless advocates in several major cities were reluctant to name any city programs as being effective in directly fighting homelessness. They say the best things city and state governments are currently doing involve affordable housing programs and tax breaks or subsidies to developers of private low-income housing.

On the national level, lobbying for affordable housing has proven most effective in fighting homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless, with members in most major cities, continuously advocates for affordable housing and against criminalization of the homeless. And coalitions of nonprofits like National People's Action (NPA) have made concrete strides in Washington regarding various housing rights. Improvements in the financially troubled Federal Housing Administration loan program is just one area where legislators responded directly to NPA's demands.

Such interest-group pressure is key to influencing the behavior of city governments toward the homeless, says Donahue. Pushing for reform on a national scale puts cities and their policies under a much-needed microscope. "They want to hide the truth about the fact that this hot economy is making more people homeless," he says. "But people are demanding justice." ■

Kari Lydersen is a reporter at the Washington Post Chicago Bureau and associate editor of Streetwise.

## THE SHADOW OF Poverty in America

# Leave the Kids Alone

## Poverty is their real problem

By Mike Males

In a boom economy, the most recent figures show that a staggering 40 percent of America's children and youth remain in low-income families. Thirteen million are poor, and 6 million of those suffer destitution in households with less than half of poverty-level income. U.S. child poverty rates are two to 10 times higher than in Western Europe, Canada or Australia. Poverty is so strongly connected to nearly everything adults think is wrong with "kids today"—murder, violent crime, unintended pregnancy, AIDS, smoking, dropping out of school—that it dwarfs every other factor.

Yet child poverty is rarely discussed today, buried under the popular, all-consuming "values" crusade and by the usefulness of children in pushing other agendas. New Democrats and Republicans agree that today's big menaces to kids are violent video games, TV, caffeine, R-rated movies, unfiltered Internet porn, raves, gangstas, Marilyn Manson, baggy pants, or any unmonitored free time. White kids with guns grace "kids without a conscience" cover stories in *People* and *Rolling Stone* that dismiss poverty as irrelevant.

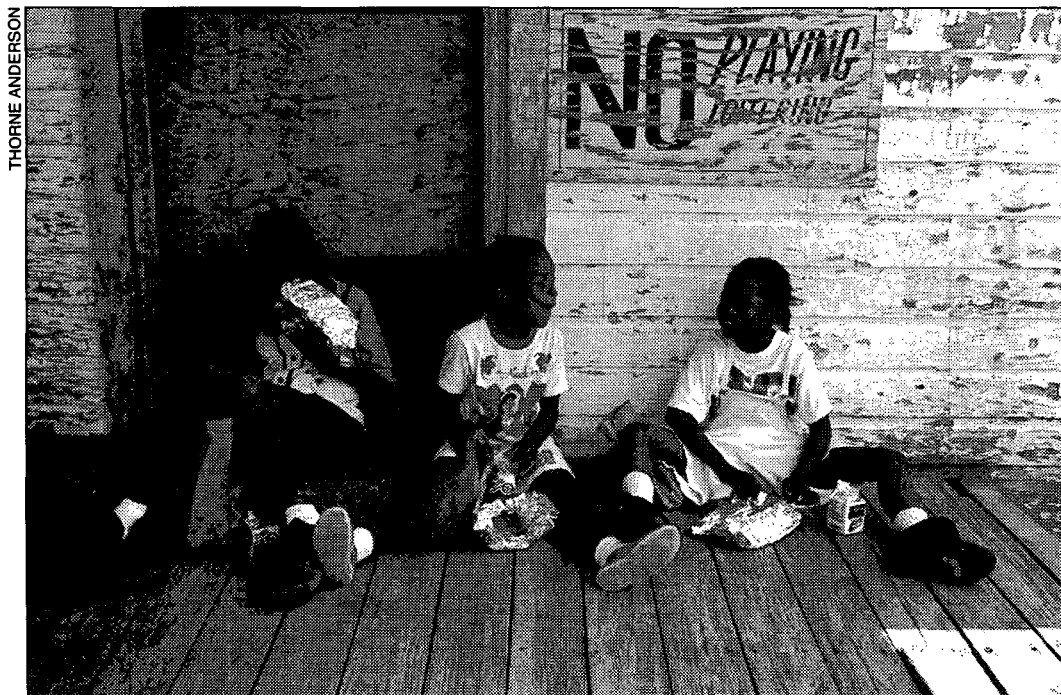
But in the real world, the likelihood of a youth being killed by gunfire, getting arrested, going to prison or dying before age 25 has a lot more to do with how poor he or she is.

Obsession with fictional screen images crowds out realities of grinding poverty, crumbling schools, vanished jobs and grownups in disarray. Culture warriors such as President Clinton, former Education Secretary Bill Bennett, the Manhattan Institute's Kay Hymowitz, *Tribe Apart* author Patricia Hersch and West Point video-game blamer Dave Grossman cite (or more often distort) scary statistics to buttress claims of a "youth culture" driven by pop-culture corruption into mass degeneration.

In truth, where U.S. kids enjoy low poverty rates like those of Europe, there are correspondingly low murder and gun-fatality rates. In California's five richest urban counties, with a combined population of 6 million, white teen-agers' poverty rates average 4 percent—similar to those of Scandinavian youth. Even in this state with one of America's highest gun-fatality rates—where white households are the most likely to harbor guns, violent cable channels and video games—the gun death rate among white teens (three per 100,000) is as low as Sweden's or Canada's. Meanwhile, poorer California youth of all colors (the vast majority black, Latino and Asian) suffer gun-fatality rates three to eight times higher. Poverty is associated with 85 percent of gun deaths among

children and youths, as well as the adults who commit most murders of children. The figures on gun murders per 100,000 youths show that class, not race, is the issue: richer white (0.8), middle-income white (2.1), lower-income color (3.1), poorer color (6.7). (Poorer California white youth are more affluent than the average youth of color.)

During the late '80s and early '90s, when the press, police and politicians went hysterical over the tripling in juvenile firearms homicides, no one mentioned a crucial factor clearly visible in crime statistics in major states like California, New York and Pennsylvania. There was no increase in murder among America's middle-class and affluent youths, whose trends



Children are given lunch on the porch of City Hall in Homestown, Missouri.



stayed at low levels throughout the period. In fact, among California's white teen-agers, murder rates have dropped 40 percent over the past 25 years (especially during the '90s, when violent video games and movies supposedly were inciting them).

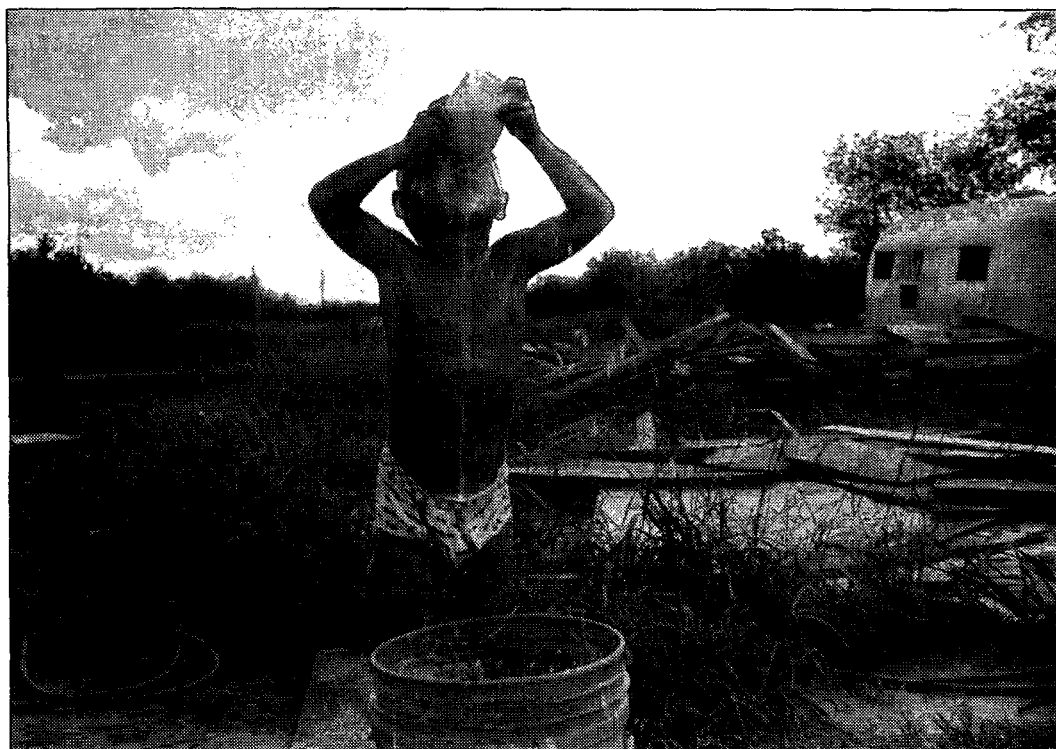
While upscale, suburban kids occasionally committed mayhem, the high rates of teenage murder and gun fatality in the early '90s occurred only among poorer youths, overwhelmingly those of color—especially youths caught in or between gangs warring to supply the soaring drug demands of white suburban adults.

So, if poverty is tied to higher risks of violence, and if more kids are poorer today, is the intense fear of “youth violence” exploited by politicians such as President Clinton and former California Gov. Pete Wilson justified?

No. For even as quotable crime authorities like Northeastern University's James Alan Fox and Princeton's John Dilulio warned in the mid-'90s that a new breed of “godless, fatherless, jobless ... adolescent superpredators” would bring a “bloodbath,” California youth were displaying dramatic decreases in crime. By the late '90s, as school shootings brought renewed cries that “killer white kids” had joined ghetto superpredators in a nationwide teen-murder epidemic, California teen-agers of all colors displayed their lowest rate of murder and serious crime in three decades.

Yet predictions of teen-age apocalypse became the excuse for a virulent, anti-youth reaction among affluent white voters and politicians. This led to massive defunding of California's once-proud school and university system, corporate abandonment of the inner-city, abolition of youth services and massive prison expansion. Left and right disagreed on what instigated the “youth crisis” and what should be done, but everyone battened the hatches.

Instead, California's new millennium was greeted by a youth population less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, less suicidal, less likely to die in traffic wrecks, more law-abiding, more likely to graduate from high school and enter college, and more apt to be employed and involved in community volunteerism than any generation in decades. From the mid-'70s to the late '90s, California's rates of youth suicides, violent deaths and felony arrests dropped 40 to 60 percent, and drug-related deaths fell an astounding 90 percent. These improvements predated the current fervor for cracking down on kids, and remain strongest in areas such as San Francisco, where get-tough



Arturo Coronado bathes at his family home in Alamo, Texas.

curfews, drug enforcement and prosecution of youths as adults were rejected by authorities.

Superficially, the fact that kids are getting poorer and better might seem to excuse Washington's current proclivities, but closer analysis reveals that widespread poverty and packed schools are serious barriers to this generation. Youth behavior improved because it had to. Explosions in drug abuse, crime and family disarray among Baby Boomers, and the War on Drugs' punitive strategies produced a startling crisis: California's fastest-growing felon and prison population by far is white adults 30 and older, followed by adults of color. Deteriorating adult behavior forced millions of youths to assume adult responsibilities earlier in life—a precocity, ironically, greeted with cultural warriors' misplaced horror that media-savvy kids “are growing up too fast.”

Poverty, narrowed opportunity and harsher anti-crime policies are not the causes of improved youth behavior; they remain impediments reflected in struggles with chaotic families, crowded schools, massive student debt, race- and class-based inequality, and dead-end jobs. Even though young people have improved as a generation due to their own efforts and a few good programs, poverty's effects still are seen in poorer populations' sharply higher crime and violent death statistics.

It is long past time for liberal groups concerned with murder and firearms deaths to make reducing poverty their priority. America's high rates of child and youth poverty are not simply evidence of preventable inequality, but preventable fatality. ■

Mike Males, author of *Framing Youth: Ten Myths About the Next Generation* (Common Courage Press), is a senior researcher with the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice and a sociology instructor at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

THE SHADOW OF  
**Poverty in America**

# The Union Difference

## Janitors point the way out of poverty

By David Moberg

**D**uring rush hour one morning in late April, 38-year-old Augusto Cuevas, wearing his red "Justice for Janitors" T-shirt, sat down in the middle of a busy intersection in suburban Chicago, blocking traffic for two hours before police arrested him and 50 fellow members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Later that day, the companies that clean commercial and high-tech office buildings in the booming "edge cities" outside Chicago returned to the bargaining table for the first time in 10 days and agreed to boost janitors' compensation by a dramatic 44 percent over three years. By the final year, Cuevas and his wife—also a janitor—will have family health insurance and each get paid \$8 an hour, up from \$6.65.

This victory—as in other recent SEIU triumphs in Los Angeles, San Diego and Cleveland—wouldn't have happened without the courage and zeal of workers like Cuevas, a recent immigrant from Mexico. A decade ago, most union leaders saw such immigrants as passive, frightened and unorganizable. Now many envision them as the militant heart of a renewed labor movement. "We got to do whatever we got to do to try to get our rights and insurance," said Cuevas, shortly after he was released by police. "Without insurance, we don't see any future for our families."

The janitors' struggle highlights an important dimension of poverty in the United States. In big cities like New York, Chicago and San Francisco, nearly 90 percent of janitors in major office buildings have been organized for many years, and their jobs provide health insurance, pensions and a decent, basic family income of nearly \$25,000 a year. But until recently, in cities like Los Angeles or in new suburban growth areas, janitors rarely had insurance and earned wages well below \$8.20 an hour, the poverty line for a family of four. Both groups did much the same work, often for the same national companies. The union made the difference, lifting hardworking but unskilled workers out of poverty.

**I**n 1998, there were about 28 million workers, 27 percent of the work force, who earned wages under \$8 an hour. Few of them—estimates run around 6 percent—belong to unions. Unions have been weak in the service and retail sectors that together account for two-thirds of low-wage employment, and labor leaders often believed that low-wage workers were too difficult to organize, despite their abundant grievances. Now some of the best organizing unions—such as SEIU, HERE (hotel workers), AFSCME (public workers), UNITE (needle trades) and the UFW (farm workers)—focus much of their efforts on low-wage workers. In recent years, these unions have scored wins with home health care aides, nursing home employees, laundry workers, hotel room cleaning staffs, child care workers and airport baggage handlers.

Low-wage work isn't monolithic: most involves limited skills, but nearly 40 percent of low-wage workers have some college education. Many better skilled but poorly paid workers—child care and health care workers and graduate teaching assistants, for example—are now assertively organizing. While many low-wage organizing campaigns mobilize recent immigrants and minorities, nearly two-thirds of low-wage workers are white; though disproportionately young, 40 percent of low-wage workers are more than 35 years old.

All these jobs have one main thing in common: They don't pay well. That's partly because the workers who hold them lack market power and can be easily replaced. Increasingly, they are contingent workers—part time, temporary or supposedly independent contractors—or they may work for a subcontractor, while another powerful company holds the purse strings. The building owners, for example, set the rates for cleaning contractors, who employ the janitors. The contractors compete viciously for corporate crumbs and therefore are highly motivated to fight unionization. In many cases, from trash haulers to day care workers, government holds the purse strings, either hiring contractors or providing funds to reimburse all or part of workers' wages.

These masked employer relationships are only part of the problem. "The primary obstacle to organizing low-wage workers is how unstable the jobs are," says Allison Porter, outgoing director of the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute. Employers often are huge, deep-pocketed companies with widely dispersed sites, like McDonald's or Wal-Mart, which overwhelm isolated efforts with their anti-union tactics but are too big to organize easily on a national scale. In manufacturing, employers routinely threaten to move—and actually relocate—out of the country to avoid a union and find even lower wages.

Further, low-wage workers often feel little attachment to their employers: They vote with their feet about discontent, churning through a series of rotten jobs. At the same time, they may be living on the edge financially and fearful of losing what little they have. David Chu, director of strategic research at the AFL-CIO, says that the biggest issue in unionizing low-wage workers is "whether you can organize and get them a contract that makes a difference in their lives."

**T**he janitors' strikes demonstrate that the power to make such a difference starts with strategy. After clawing its way back over the past 15 years to represent more than 70 percent of janitors in several regions, SEIU carefully planned its contracts to expire near the same time this year. This strategy took into account both the importance of local building service markets and the growing power of national cleaning firms and realty companies. The key to both the





In the janitors' strike, the dynamic presence of the rank and file helped create an incredible outpouring of public support.

organizing and the strikes this year, however, was educating and mobilizing union members. The disruptions—both at the workplace, reinforced by unionized building engineers and truckers, and in the community, by blocking highways—created a broader crisis. The union then used community and political allies to increase pressure on both building owners and cleaning companies.

The battle was fought on favorable political terrain: Low unemployment gave workers confidence and clout, and the deepening gulf between the glittering rich techno-elites and the impoverished, hardworking immigrants—especially in Los Angeles and Silicon Valley—provided workers with the moral high ground. “There was a surprising nerve struck by the gross unfairness of people making \$6.80 an hour in Los Angeles,” says Stephen Lerner of SEIU. “There was no way to justify it. The strike was incredibly visible and disruptive. It’s not an image a lot of cities want, of workers in poverty amid incredible wealth.”

Five years ago, the union started training rank-and-file leaders on how to turn the inequity of their jobs into social power. “We got them excited about their union,” says Mike Garcia, president of the 22,000-member janitor local that stretches from Los Angeles to Sacramento. “We wanted to plug in our members every step of the way, in politics, in leadership development and understanding the industry. They feel the union is theirs to operate and make decisions. When the strike came, they were ready.”

The dynamic presence of the members helped create an incredible outpouring of public support, but it also reminded politicians of the growing importance of Latino voters, often mobilized for critical elections by the union. “You need to think creatively and strategically,” Garcia says. “You can’t be

afraid to take risks. Our decision to move the question of the disparity between the rich and poor is the key one. The general public is responsive to that kind of campaign. You can’t be just locked in battle with the employer and scabs, but have to think of what other pressure you can build, to know their business and their weaknesses.”

The campaign for low-wage workers succeeds when it is broadly political and unflinchingly moral. Unions have learned to reach out to allies in churches and the community in campaigns to require businesses with government contracts or subsidies to pay a “living wage,” for example. HERE has used local allies to demand that new, publicly subsidized hotels and convention centers not be antagonistic to unions. In its Silicon Valley contract campaign, janitors hope to forge a relationship with high-tech companies not only to win a healthy contract, but also to build affordable housing—without which even the best contract will be inadequate. A new coalition of more than 40 worker advocacy groups and unions, the National Association for Fair Employment, will be fighting for everything from legal restrictions on abuse of independent contractors to voluntary codes of conduct for temporary employment agencies.

Yet in the end, argues organizing consultant Richard Bensinger, “the only way to prove commitment [to low wage and immigrant workers] is to organize them. Legislative or policy positions don’t get it done. We have to put money, clout and organizers where the rhetoric is.” The janitors’ success in Los Angeles has already brought new organizing and contract victories for other low-wage Angelenos. Their example may yet inspire more of the militant, member-oriented unionism that is proving the fight against poverty may not be futile after all. ■

# Ancient Daze

By Joshua Rothkopf

**G**ladiator is the kind of warm-weather bruiser you can have fun with—even while it's having its terrible way with you. It's a very proud movie: Only 20 minutes pass and we've

**Gladiator**  
Directed by Ridley Scott

already been treated to a ferocious dog with orange eyes, a severed head flung in the mud, and the efficient devastation of a sizable forest in Germania. Those Roman legionnaires sure knew how to catapult a firebomb at their tribal enemies; so total is this opening rout that its only purpose is to wow us with crude imperial will. Says one commanding officer with the arrogance that comes with the scorched territory: "People should know when they're conquered."

In this picture, audiences are meant to be conquered too, not just thrilled but pummeled by its size, its cost, its thousands of extras—the mind reels at the catering alone. *Gladiator* is more than just a revival of the "sword-and-sandal" period epic, itself as dusty as a Roman coin; it's a return to the studio-driven colossus that throws a fortune at silliness just because it can. This excess used to have an ostensible justification in the threat of television, then in its infancy. Competitive innovations like the horizon-stretching Cinemascope made their debuts with the pomp and glory of *The Robe*; *Land of the Pharaohs* and *Ben Hur* chased ponderously after steadily dwindling receipts lost to the tube.

But the movie industry has long since given up the fight, edging ever closer to shortened attention spans and the emotional tidiness of *Friends*. Hollywood still knows how to spend money, of course. *Gladiator* assures us of this and tries to swap that for genuine engagement, not wholly in vain. But the grandeur rushes by impatiently; all too often the drama feels strictly small screen, like a video game. The script registers like a time-honored recipe that

has been undercooked: mix a dozen chariots with several gallons of fake blood, add the angst of a slave or two, a pinch of decadence—yet the dough doesn't rise. How can you have circuses without any bread?

**T**he director, Ridley Scott, must have seemed a good choice on paper, a virtual guarantee of luster. Most famously, he turned artificiality and craft into an utterly persuasive, rain-drenched doomscape with *Blade Runner*, a sci-fi benchmark that continues to impress after 20 years of technological advances. Scott can even impart the air with tactility, fogging his interiors with motes of dust or, as in *Gladiator*, slowly

(*Alien*), or icons in a post-feminist Mustang commercial (*Thelma & Louise*). As in the arena, only the strongest survive this suffocating prettiness, and Russell Crowe just makes the cut as Maximus, our titular hero, despite a poorly developed role. Crowe deserves better: He pulled off a tour-de-force in last year's *The Insider* as the conflicted corporate whistleblower. Try to imagine that part with none of its outspokenness and all of the glowering and you'll come to a fair approximation of this film's Maximus—a general of few words who, through bad luck and the jealousy of the emperor's son, comes to be sold as a slave. Now a gladiator, he must fight his way to fame and a trip to the Colosseum for his vengeance.

That's basically it for the plot, which all but cries out in its thematic impoverishment. It underutilizes Crowe, a waste, and overtaxes Scott, who is



JAAP BUITENDIJK/DREAMWORKS

**Stand by your man.**

falling snowflakes. "Rome is the light," we hear early on; Scott takes this literally, bathing the film in creamy hues of gold falling into darkest shadow under icy skies. The film never fails to look absolutely delicious.

More problematic is his tendency to turn people into objects as well, either as artificial replicants (*Blade Runner*), warm homes for parasitic monsters

required to propel the brunt of the momentum through showdowns of kinetic action—never his strong point. His precision falls apart in one choppy battle sequence after the next, each a blurred mess of microsecond edits and shutter-speed twiddling. For all his command, he can't seem to sustain a simple narrative of blows, sidestepping the promise of catharsis with an



impressionist's fickleness that infuriates. (Scott did start off as an art school student.) The bag of tricks is never depleted: slow-motion impalements, computer-generated dismemberment, handheld nausea. I was praying for a tiger attack on the cameraman just so he might retreat by a few yards to establish some perspective; instead we have to wait for the dust to settle to make out the casualties.

Crowds at my two screenings didn't seem to find these incoherent death matches insulting, even though they cater mainly to our bloodlust. Roars of the attending mob rock the house—and not just from *Gladiator's* deafening soundtrack. But the picture's screenwriters, speaking through rational senators, would also have us reprove the vulgarity of young emperor Commodus' 150 days of games: "He'll bring them death and they will love

him for it." Gloats Commodus: "I will give the people the greatest vision of their lives," perhaps reading from Scott's contract with Dreamworks.

### **Decadence, a dozen chariots, the angst of a slave or two, and gallons of fake blood.**

(Joaquin Phoenix has a great time with the lip-quivering villainy.)

Everyone seems in on the gag though, turning the overall hypocrisy into something winking and watchable. "Win the crowd and you will win your freedom," intones Proximo (the late Oliver Reed), a former gladiator now both the owner and coach of Maximus; the plummy line reads like an agent's mantra. Clapping the brood-

ing Maximus on the shoulder, he confesses, "I'm an entertainer."

Putting on a spectacle is nothing more and nothing less—and it's the only truth in the film. Scott knows this and lets his images rule over fuzzy intimations in the script of incest and a populist crusade against tyranny. Where are these oppressed? They mass in the bleachers, victims presumably of abusive ticket prices. Looking out, Maximus vents his disgust at their base urges but (carefully) not ours; that would be no fun. Besides, Scott has more visceral concerns: a convoy of guards behind glossy black shields rising majestically from beneath the arena; Commodus' stainless white armor; glints in the spattered sand. By the end, any political dimensions have been shorn from the inevitable head-to-head—and maybe that's appropriate. After all, these people still had Septimus Servus to look forward to. ■

## **A Class by Itself**

By Bill Boisvert

**F**or centuries the bourgeoisie has fought a running battle with bohemia, pitting bourgeois sobriety against bohemian intoxication, continence against sexual abandon, calculation against emotion, science against nature, materialism against art,

### **Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There**

By David Brooks  
Simon & Schuster  
284 pages, \$25

hierarchy against equality. Things came to a head in the '60s, when long hair and tie-dye squared off against brush cut and pin stripes; the bohemians routed the bourgeoisie, only to be driven back by the Reaganite reaction of the '80s. But the culture wars are finally over, David Brooks writes, for bourgeois and bohemian have finally realized that, working together, they can conquer the world.

Brooks' new book, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Classes and How They Got There*, is about the vanguard of this new cultural synergy. "Bobos" means

"bourgeois bohemians," the highly educated information and technology workers at the forefront of the New Economy. The hallmark of Bobos, Brooks writes, is their ability to reconcile opposites. They are the tattooed dot-com executives who put in 100-hour weeks overthrowing the corporate status quo. They are the well-heeled exurbanites who showcase their solidarity with the downtrodden by decorating their million-dollar homes with peasant handicrafts. They are the genteel denizens of S/M clubs whose Web sites primly advertise their anti-septically safe debauchery and extol mutual respect through bondage. Bobo consumerism is ecologically sensitive and morally uplifting, built around natural fibers, crusading long-distance carriers and conscientious recycling. Hailing from the nation's exclusive zip codes, Bobos pride themselves on their informality and dishevelledness. They are an anti-elitist elite.

While not exactly new, Brooks' observations about this much-observed group are often fresh and engaging. Yet the beguiling inconsistencies that Brooks

riffs upon raise troubling issues that his book never really confronts. Are the self-contradictory mores of this demographic an eclectic third way between doctrinaire extremes, or just so much hypocrisy? Are all social conflicts really a matter of clashing cultural sensibilities? Do anti-elitist manners signify the demise of the ruling elite, or the success of a kinder, gentler ruling elite that has co-opted and neutralized all opposition? Can a ruling elite ever be kind and gentle?

**B**rooks is a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard* and quotes extensively from older neoconservative publications like *Commentary*. By positing the Bobos as the synthesis of the world-historical dialectic between the '60s and the '80s, his book is really a reappraisal of the Baby Boomers from a neocon perspective. Born in reaction to the excesses of the New Left, but rooted in a tradition of Jewish intellectualism, neoconservatism has never been entirely at ease with the libertarians, militiamen and fundamentalists who make up its allies on the right. Brooks implies that the time is ripe for a neocon rapprochement with the Age of Aquarius.

According to Brooks, the Bobos emerged after World War II, when new SAT-based admissions policies at elite

universities—the gateway into the ranks of the powerful—opened the Ivy League to bright students from modest backgrounds. At the same time, the postwar shift to an “information economy” put a premium on the skills of the new university-educated technocrats. These developments spelled doom for the old East Coast Wasp elite, whose privilege derived from family connections and money; they were first mocked and then overthrown by the Bobos.

Thus, unlike past elites of “blood and wealth,” the Bobos are a meritocracy. Membership in their ranks is based on an impartial test, while their many advanced degrees make them natural leaders in an economy where “ideas and knowledge are at least as vital ... as natural resources and finance capital.” The talented, hard-working Bobocracy has done away with the galling mismatch between ability and social rank that so incensed the Third Estate in its salad days, and quieted all the Veblenesque wisecracks about the leisure class.

So all those campus radicals were really the unwitting standard-bearers of a new bourgeois revolution. Indeed, in Brooks’ view the characteristics that made the New Left so repulsive in its prodigal youth now make Bobos the very pillars of responsible capitalism. Knee-jerk anti-authoritarianism makes Bobos inveterate skeptics of big government. Their passion for “diversity” makes Bobos recoil at central planning in favor of local control. Their spiritual hunger, which once led them into the wilderness of New Age therapy religions, has brought them full circle to the respectable mainline creeds, embraced not as foaming-at-the-mouth dogmas but as a social cement of comforting if meaningless ritual. Their longing for authentic community, once explored on organic farms and free-love communes, now works itself out in home-improvement projects and the PTA. Politically, Brooks claims, Bobos are—like arch-Bobo Bill Clinton—mildly reformist moderates, espousing individual responsibility with communitarian overtones, happy to triangulate away all controversies. Nowadays the great political divide is “between those who have fused the sixties and the eighties on one side and those who reject the fusion on the other,” that is,

between Bobos and the “polarizers” of either right or left, those few reprobates who still reject the Bobo compromise and are “perpetually coming up with radical and loopy ideas—destroy the IRS, nationalize healthcare.”

While Brooks paints Boboism as a drift to the center, it seems more like a shove to the right. After all, destroying the IRS is the rallying cry of many a Bobo cybernaut. But even a well-meaning quietism has a political valence. While Brooks concedes that

**Do tatooed  
dot-com executives  
and hippie CEOs  
practice an eclectic  
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bohemian, or just so  
much hypocrisy?**

the civil rights movement and Vietnam might once have motivated a serious politics, nowadays Bobos are content to have their principles marketed to them as lifestyle accouterments. Surely this tendency is a de facto conservatism that buttresses the status quo. Tolerance, humanity and social responsibility, to be effectively expressed, must be more than sentiments and purchasing profiles; they must be political programs, complete with radical, loopy ideas that unsettle the upper classes.

**B**rooks is funny and insightful on the Bobo quest for authenticity through shopping. At home, Bobos love the unprocessed textures of nature—rough-hewn stone, undyed fabrics, unpolished wood—although they prefer a high-tech cocoon of Gore-Tex and reflector goggles when out in nature itself. Bobos drive pick-up trucks, fetishize power tools and decorate their kitchens with heavy-duty industrial ranges and refrigerators; after a long day analyzing symbols at the office, they spend their leisure time surrounded by the trappings of manual labor. The Restoration Hardware company makes a fortune helping Bobos replace the mass-

produced clutter of modern life with retro mass-produced clutter from the '40s and '50s, back when mass production had a soul. Bobos buy brand new faded jeans, brand new dented furniture and brand new battered steamer trunks festooned with stickers from ports where they never called. They want their stuff to have a past, even if they don't.

But Brooks is wrong when he says that the symbiosis between bourgeois and bohemian is something new, a millennial paradigm shift; in fact it is a central theme of modernity. Capitalism needs bohemian self-indulgence as much as it does bourgeois self-discipline. Brooks repeatedly cites Flaubert as an anti-bourgeois zealot, yet *Madame Bovary* is an acute analysis of this symbiosis: As Emma tries to fill up the void in her soul with silk dresses and fancy furnishings, her insatiable romantic longings galvanize a sleepy village economy into a frenzy of debt-financed luxury production.

Today more than ever, the machinery of capitalism is stoked by grandiose advertised visions of bohemian sensuality and self-actualization. What's changed, perhaps, is the old division of labor that used to separate patron from artist, stolid burgher from swooning wife. Now everyone is supposed to play all these roles, to be cool professionals on the job and impulsive hedonists at the mall. The Bobos have gone even further, Brooks claims, for they have completely erased the psychological bifurcation between what they do for money and what they do for love. In his chapter on the business life of Bobos, Brooks salutes the hippie CEOs who flatten hierarchies, break all the rules and “emphasize creativity and liberation” for their employees:

Workers in this spiritualized world of Bobo capitalism are not the heroes of toil. They are creators. They noodle around and experiment and dream. They seek to explore and then surpass the full limits of their capacities. ... Self cultivation is the imperative.

“The weird thing,” Brooks adds, “is that when employees start thinking like artists and activists, they actually work harder.”

That is kind of weird, but unfortunately Brooks doesn't explore the



conundrum of highly exploitable yet totally unalienated labor, shrugging it off instead as just another of "the cultural contradictions of capitalism—resolved!" Of course, one way of getting to the bottom of weirdness is to re-examine facts, but this Brooks doesn't do. He never asks whether all the talk of equality and empowerment and self-expression he reads about in company mission statements and *Fortune* profiles is really true or just bullshit. Take his account of Restoration Hardware CEO Stephen Gordon, an iconically "loose" and "real" tycoon who "led a water balloon fight and a game of Red Rover during the company retreat." Despite the "quasi-egalitarian ethos," his leadership is never stymied: "Everybody at the meeting gets a vote, but somehow Gordon's is decisive."

Again, that's a weird thing. Everyone votes, yet, "somehow," the boss always decides things. But this enigma just prompts Brooks to brood over "the paradoxes of information age enterprises: although they ... promote equality, today's CEOs tend to dominate their companies even more." Brooks incessantly hymns the "information economy," as if ideas and knowledge were a new discovery of the '90s, but he is credulous, even mystical, about the actual ideas emanating from all those vacuous MBA degrees. For him, "information" doesn't clarify the inequities of the workplace, it just blurs them enough so that he can marvel at the holy paradox of Business Casual.

Brooks' insistence that class is about style and information becomes really ludicrous when he turns to the subject of Bobo intellectuals. Brooks lampoons, to good effect, the careerism and media-whoring of contemporary academics. But unlike the *Partisan Review* crowd of old, Brooks continues, Bobo intellectuals are no ivory-tower snobs. They "understand the world better" because "they experience the same sorts of pressures that confront most people."

Brooks' fictional example is a tenured University of Chicago professor with a berth on the pundit gravy train. What keeps her real? Well, she and her foundation-executive husband make only \$180,000 a year, which barely covers their daughter's tuition

at Stanford, the older son's prep-school bill and the \$32,000 salary for a nanny to baby-sit their 9-year-old after school. Even worse, they feel insecure when they compare their own shabby earnings with the millions raked in by the Bobo doctors and lawyers they socialize with. The pressures of dealing with nannies and prep-schools and talk-show bookings, Brooks reasons, give Bobos deep insights into the concerns of the common man, insights that some penniless egghead in a garret would never have.

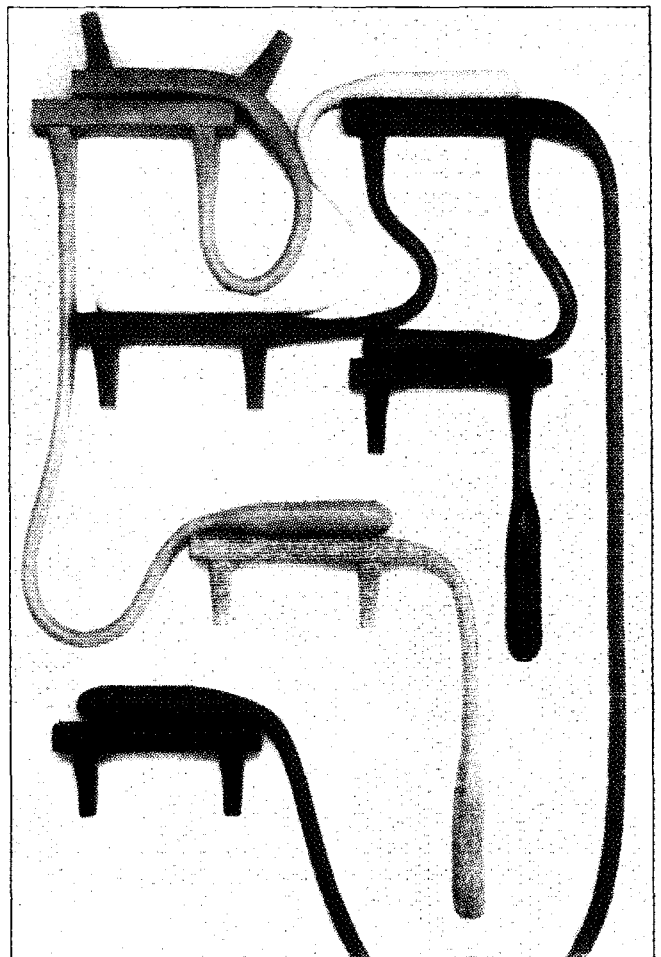
Most of all, the "status-income disequilibrium" of this every-Bobo family supposedly heralds the final abolition of class privilege. With nothing but merit to back them up, Bobos operate on an eternally leveled playing field; they must constantly earn their place at the top by

working harder, learning more and piling up those skills. But this conceit ignores the many institutionalized safeguards that prevent the upper classes, Bobos included, from falling. Brooks doesn't mention, for example, that the University of Chicago pays the college tuition for children of faculty. Perks like that go with the territory: a cushy job with sweet benefits that yields a fat bank account, which you splurge on private schools and SAT prep-courses so your kids can go to Stanford and get cushy jobs with sweet benefits.

In the end, bohemianism has nothing to do with it; class is

still about blood and wealth. For all their piercings and dreadlocks, Brooks' information honchos preside over a nation of uniformed janitors, uniformed fast-food cooks, uniformed guards watching uniformed inmates. For all their spirituality, their main cultural effort is the facilitation of Internet porn. While they collect hand-made peasant artifacts in their spare time, as emissaries of globalization they are busy rousting real peasants out of their villages and into maquiladoras. They fret about global warming, but fight to the death any SUV-busting hikes in the gas tax. Their localism is the localism of gated enclaves. As always, a paradise for the few is a sweatshop for the many. ■

Bill Boisvert, a writer in New York, contributes frequently to *In These Times*.



Shelf-titled #9 by Charles Long. From a sculpture exhibition by Long, Siobhan Hapaska and Ernesto Neto at Stockholm's Magasin 3 Konsthall, on view until June 13.

# A Different Point of View

By Pat Aufderheide

A young Algerian woman, hugely pregnant with twins, weeps as she recalls the terrorist bomb that almost killed her grandfather. The INS officer who denies her asylum tries to hold back tears of frustration as he later explains his decision, and then begs gruffly, "Turn that damn thing off." It's *Well-Founded Fear*, a documentary that takes you into the political asylum process, where horror is routine and the stakes are too high not to lie.

A dowager bustles up to her old family mansion in Havana, now a bank. She tries to wheedle a glimpse of her childhood playroom, while her son squirms with embarrassment at her side. But when she goes home, her visit sinks in, and she starts talking back to the Cuban-American right. It's *Our House in Havana*, a story about the passions that fueled the Elián González drama.

An Appalachian filmmaker recalls hearing, back in 1967, that an eccentric old man had shot a Canadian filmmaker to death for standing on his property. The terrible news also evoked her deep resentment at the parade of journalists who too often simply exploited Appalachia's poverty. Thirty years later, she interviews the dead filmmaker's daughter, now herself the outsider capturing someone else's reality. It's *Stranger with a Camera*, an acutely personal story about the power of the image and the responsibility of the storyteller.

It is now easy to see these films, all of which are on the P.O.V. public television series lineup this summer. But they're not going to your local cineplex, despite lavish critical acclaim. Several of P.O.V.'s selections debuted at the Sundance Film Festival, the commercial gateway for independent films. *Well-Founded Fear* (June 5), by Michael Camerini and Shari Robertson, was one of the festival's sensations—for a reason.

The filmmakers had won access to long-forbidden territory (the INS chief hoped to showcase improved

procedures). They stayed there long enough to let us view high-stakes drama from both sides. With their respectful choices of framing, contrapuntal editing, and fly-on-the-wall camera, the filmmakers avoid the spectacle of intimacy that is the curse of this genre. The story ends up being about the INS officers—the overweight, overwhelmed, decent people put in the position of deciding other people's fates three times a day. You can't help asking yourself what you would do—and what we as a nation should do.

*Well-Founded Fear* was a must-see at Sundance. But for documentaries, that doesn't translate to a hip indie release at a theater near you. Many award-winning documentaries might never get a mass audience at all, if it weren't for P.O.V., which searches out provoca-

tive, opinionated films made by people out of conviction and not careerism. At P.O.V., not only are important subjects addressed as if they really matter, but there's more range of documentary artistic choice here than you'll get by holding your thumb down on the remote for a complete channelsurf.

Sometimes a film in the series just catches you by surprise. I was ready to dismiss *Butterfly* (June 20), a movie about Julia Butterfly Hill, who at 22 ascended a redwood tree and stayed there for two years until its preservation was secured. I dreaded the prospect of listening to poetry written by someone named Butterfly at 180 feet. But filmmaker Doug Wolens chiseled away at my jadedness until I could take her "cosmos speak"—as one of the locals calls it—as part of an extravagant, courageous gesture. A

physical well-being

THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

## RESOLUTION

sense of the Senate regarding the role of visual arts in leading to wasted natural resources, the introduction of hazardous substances into the environment, lost man-hours, effects on the mental and physical well-being of artists and their families, and the role of an art tax in reducing these consequences.

Whereas studies in consumer behavior conclude that use of art supplies and other resources decreases significantly when the price of these materials increases;

Whereas art historical precedent shows that the dematerialization of the art object is a viable mode of aesthetic inquiry;

Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that--

- (1) traditional studio practices within the visual arts cause unnecessary waste of natural resources, introduce hazardous substances to the environment, and have been shown to adversely affect the health and welfare of U.S. citizens;
- (2) imposing a Federal excise tax on materials used for the fabrication of art cause a decrease in their use;
- (3) a Federal excise tax on art supplies imposed in order to reduce the drain on the economy and threat to the environment caused by artists.

more than 13 million Americans engage in some form of visual art production, and every 30 seconds a new work of art is created;

as about 75% of artists make their first work of art when they are age 18 or younger;

as traditional visual art making practices consume large amounts of precious natural resources, and have a negative effect on the nation's

**The Art Tax Act of 2000** by Charles Gute. Gute's two large-scale documents, in the form of a Senate resolution and congressional bill, propose a tax on art supplies to pay for the "drain on the economy and threat to the environment" caused by artists. On view at Patricia Sweetow Gallery in San Francisco through June 3.



beautiful woman, Hill radiates charisma whether she's explaining how to go to the bathroom from her tiny perch, how she communicates with talk show hosts, or the terror of a winter storm. Wolens does an excellent job of giving us context, and finds plenty of evidence that damns the area's timber magnate as greedy, short-sighted and environmentally stupid. The people who are flooding into bookstores for Hill's new—and remarkably funny—book, *The Legacy of Luna*, are another clue to her ability to inspire environmental passion.

Some movies just stay on your mind. That was *La Boda* (June 27) for me. It's the story of a wedding in one migrant-farming family. Promising filmmaker Hannah Weyer lived with the family in the months leading up to their daughter Elizabeth's wedding to another migrant worker. *La Boda* is full

of little moments that linger, like the classic mother-daughter tiff about whether to purchase more table decorations and Elizabeth's sisters' ecstatic

**I dreaded the prospect of listening to poetry written by somebody named Butterfly at 180 feet.**

demonstration of how wonderful it will be to sleep only two-to-a-bed when she leaves. The film considers the social cost of fresh-picked food and how Elizabeth has made dozens of cross-country trips, each one taking her out of school. And it shows you how one poor family puts together the biggest day of a girl's life—with a lot of help from their friends.

P.O.V. was born out of the socially committed filmmaking movement, and it's still dedicated to the idea that broadcasting can be an opportunity to organize. Many organizations are tying broadcasts to their own events (to link up, write: connect@pov.org). The Web site for *Well-Founded Fear* lets you be the INS officer, in cases that unfold week by week.

Some local public TV stations are hosting screenings. If you attend these events, cameras will be waiting to film anyone who wants to talk back to P.O.V. about the programming. Or you could send in your own tape; P.O.V. airs commentary in later episodes.

The new P.O.V. season extends well into the fall. That's good, because the series has become an all-too-rare resource for viewers who want to watch world-class documentaries that make a difference. ■

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# Letters

Continued from inside cover

## That Judis

I have watched John B. Judis, formerly of *Socialist Revolution* and *In These Times*, drift right (toward the establishment) for years.

With about six decades of on-and-off activism to my credit, I've decided progress needs two kinds of support. It needs liberals—those essentially middle-class, articulate, respectable, work-through-the-system folks. They're sometimes capable of startling idealism, but generally collapse into wimpdom when the reforms they advocate come too close to home or conservatives put some real pressure on them. Even more, progress needs radicals—those determined, raucous, grassroots trouble-makers, who want more reform than any liberal would willingly give them.

The scenario generally goes like this: The establishment operates the status quo. Clamor for reform comes from radicals. It is their activism, finally, that gets the liberals off their comfortable duffs. Both then confront the conservatives of the establishment. If sufficient pressure has

developed, the establishment then makes concessions to the liberals, and both try to deny that any of this was in any way a result of the ruckus the radicals had raised. The establishment then proceeds to negate the concessions as soon as seems propitious. Sometimes that takes years, like the time between FDR and Ronald Reagan.

For Judis to expect the affluent to be moved to acts of civic consciousness and societal welfare without a large, radical grassroots movement lighting fires under the liberal respectables—who then may push the conservatives to yield some concessions, and, hopefully, thereby restore public decorum—is to live in the foggy clouds of lazy liberal illusion.

Laurence G. Wolf  
Cincinnati

## Wrong Way

David Dyssegaard Kallick describes various approaches for progressive change, from reformist to more radical ("Steering the Global Economy," May 1). But he doesn't mention anything about some of the points that have been made by folks with the

Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy (POCLAD). They point out that the corporation is a fictive legal entity, indispensable for the consolidation of money and power in the hands of elites, but chartered (in the United States, at any rate) by each state government. As such, it is an entity whose purpose is to serve the public interest. So why on earth should the public "negotiate" with corporations? Why accept a subservient role with respect to a fictive legal entity, a creature of our own nominally democratic state?

At best, bargaining with capitalists is a short-term strategy, a way station on the path to real democracy. At worst, it's a strategy for being co-opted and left in an indefinite state of more (or currently less) benevolent plutocratic rule. We must set our sights higher than that. Leaving the plutocracy intact renders any smaller gains short-term and transitory, subject to the whim of the elites and the vicissitudes of such unaccountable abstractions as "world trade."

Guy Berliner  
San Diego

David Dyssegaard Kallick replies: Does bargaining with corporations mean accepting a subservient role for the state? I see the point, but I'm not convinced. Governments—local, state and national—have many levers for transforming capitalism: contractual agreements, regulatory powers, revoking charters, shaping the conditions for union organization, to name a few. Some levers are based on government's power in the market, others are based on its power as democratic sovereign. We need to use many levers to transform capitalism, not one. (The opposite of reformism, by the way, is not radicalism—a radical agenda can be pursued via gradual transformation. The opposite of reform is revolution.)

In a longer version of my article, I referenced POCLAD's work ([www.poclad.org](http://www.poclad.org)) and cited director Richard Grossman's useful reminder that we should not be lulled into a language suggesting that under globalization all countries are equal. The United States rules the forces of globalism; it is not ruled by it. As he said, "We're the superpower, we're driving the WTO and these agreements."



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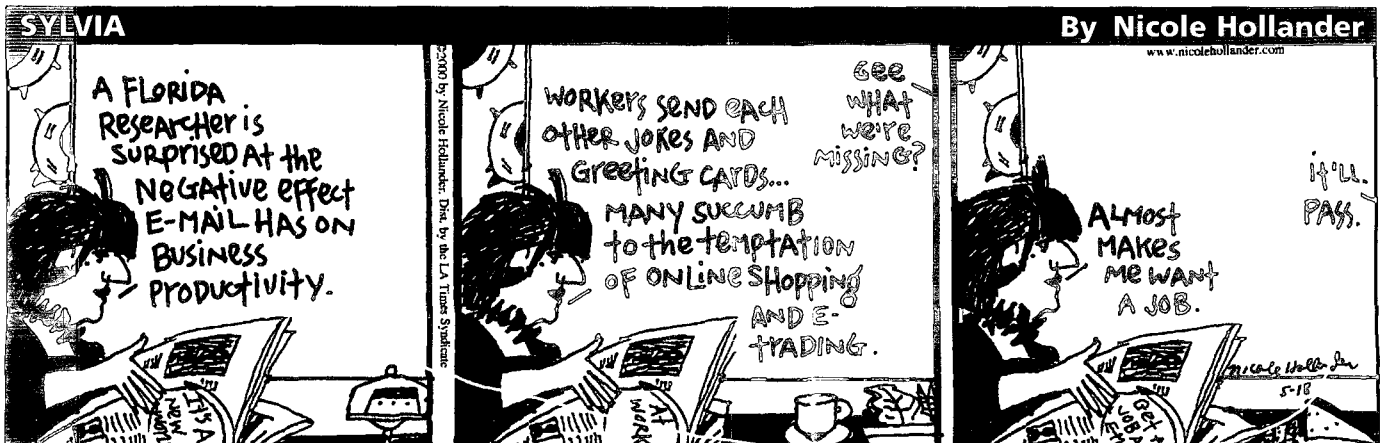


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Carrie hugs her boyfriend Byron after he returns from turning a trick.

*Continued from page 38*  
semesters at the San Francisco Art Institute, and continued it for two years. For the first month, I spent eight hours a day visiting Polk Street, but I never took a picture during that

time. The street kids laughed and gawked at me, but I eventually became as much of a fixture on Polk Street as they were.

*Where are these kids from?*  
The kids I photographed

came from all throughout the United States. Polk Street is famous for its homeless youth community. They flocked there to be with their own kind. Some went through Polk Street very quickly. Others

stayed to make a family on the streets.

*Why did they leave home?*

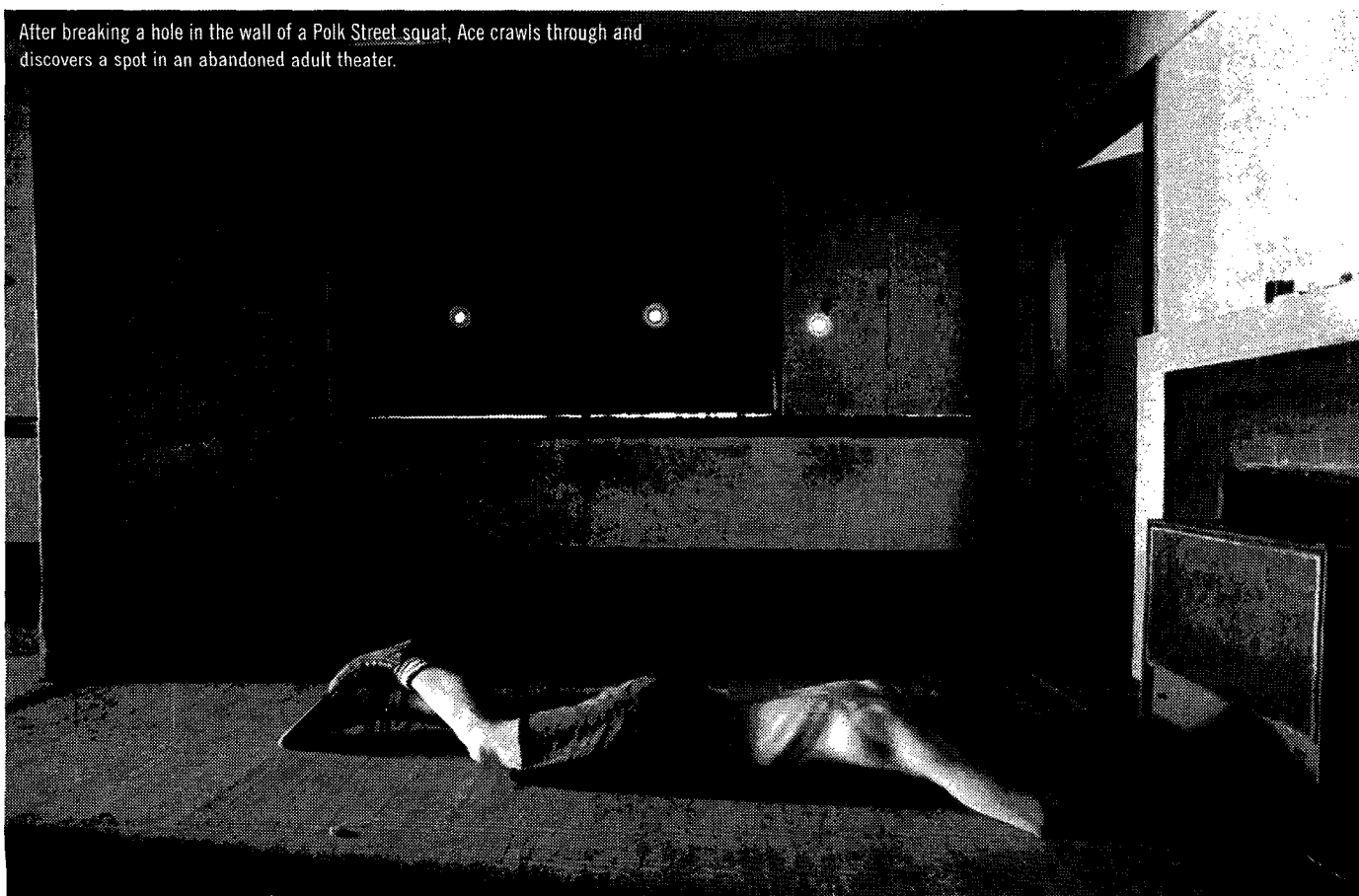
I rarely knew their histories. But the stories I did hear were typical: sexual and physical abuse, drugs and alcohol running rampant in the family, behavior disorders or parents who just didn't want to deal with their children. Considering the rejection, fear and loneliness that come from such situations, it made sense to me that these kids did not have the power to just get a job and change their situations. Also, some were too young to work.

*What was a typical day like on Polk Street? How do the kids get money?*

During the morning hours, the police would sweep the street and wake up the kids sleeping in cardboard boxes, doorways or abandoned buildings. Then they would plop themselves on a corner and begin panhandling for some food, but mostly for drugs to get them through the day.

The guys would also hustle

After breaking a hole in the wall of a Polk Street squat, Ace crawls through and discovers a spot in an abandoned adult theater.





older gay men. Many of them had regulars who would come by at the same time. Others would evenly space themselves out along a four-block strip of Polk Street and wait for a potential john. Then it was time to find a different safe place to sleep.

The kids on Polk Street were often seen as homosexuals because they hustled. In fact, most were not and had girlfriends. The boys just didn't want the girls resorting to prostitution.

*Why the chivalry? Is there a different set of rules for guys and girls?*

Not exactly. But the guys do feel a sense of protection for the girls. In all honestly, it's less dangerous for a guy to hustle than a girl. Typically, he would share the money with his girlfriend. But if a friend needs help, too, it's offered.

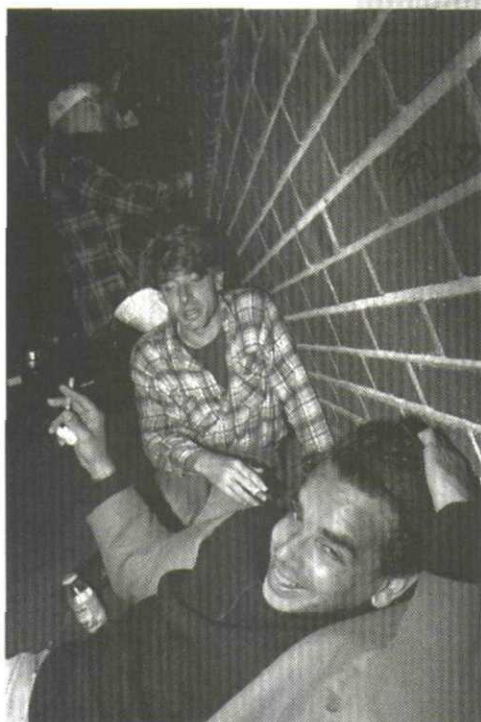
*How did you relate to them?*

Teen-agers with no shelter, no money and horrific pasts might seem depressing and difficult to deal with. But the street kids were extremely nice and generous to me. I became very good friends with them despite our dissimilar lives. I had a car, money, an apartment, food and health. They



ABOVE: Byron and Carrie find some quiet time together in a friend's apartment.

LEFT: Eric (foreground) and Scotty (middle) sit on Polk Street coming down from heroin. Drug abuse is rampant among San Francisco's runaways. Scotty contracted HIV from using a dirty needle.



had none of these things and they still accepted me.

Occasionally, the street kids would fall into a large sum of money either by hustling or from a generous John. They typically

offered me part of that amount. They bought me food or gas, or just gave me a few dollars as a thank you. I rarely viewed them as my subjects. We were friends.

*Have you been back to Polk Street since you finished the project?*

The last time I went to Polk Street was in the spring of 1999. I entertained the idea

of adding to the project when I found out two of the kids were still down there hustling. I lasted about a month before I became irritated and depressed. The drug situation had worsened tremendously.

I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that I had very strong relationships with these kids, and I couldn't rekindle that. ■





Lenny spends his nights in an abandoned parking garage in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. Because of strict admission policies and fear of being sent back home, few homeless teens go to shelters.

**T**eens are expected to push limits and approach life with a certain impetuosity. But many more teens are growing up without the stability of a home. The young are among the fastest growing groups of homeless. Each year, 2.8 million teens run away, more than 60 percent of whom left home because of physical or sexual abuse.

Kevin Weinstein began photographing runaways on Polk Street in San Francisco's Tenderloin District when he was in art school. He was only 22 at the time, and his photographs express the stormy vitality of adolescence, when the future is an afterthought. At the same time, the stark world of the street is ever present. Here, there really is no future.

Weinstein is now a staff photojournalist for Copley's Sun Publications near Chicago. His story about street kids won first place in the documentary category for College Photographer of the Year in 1994. Most recently, he received a grant from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture to do a project on Ethiopian Jews in Israel.

Kristin Kolb talked to Weinstein about his experiences with runaways on Polk Street.

*How did this project start? How did you meet these kids?*

I began the runaway series in 1992 when I was in between

*Continued on page 36*